

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Spring showers remind us of flowers, but it could also remind us to conserve water by capturing it from the sky. No water bills, no issues with city water additives or contaminants, flooded sewage systems or regional electricity outages. However, harvesting the sky requires filtration and knowledge about how to keep the water safe and available during droughts or freezing conditions. It can be done!

If you're unfamiliar with rainwater harvesting, capturing, etc, then you might start with a small goal if the idea interests you. Perhaps you can create a rain barrel in the various rain barrel workshops offered around Northwest Arkansas throughout the year. If the food-grade barrel is clear, remember to paint it so the sunlight does not penetrate and cause harmful bacteria to form. Of course, most people use rain barrels for their garden and yard, which is fantastic! They can be works of art as well as practical tools.

Beyond rain barrels and small-scale capturing, things get more complex. Using cisterns and filters can meet all your household water needs, even in dry parts of the country, as long as certain methods are used well. Here in Northwest Arkansas, as the past week has demonstrated, we rarely have trouble getting lots of rain! But it helps to have the right materials. If your roof (or catchment surface, such as a garage or barn) has a conventional shingled roof that would leech toxins into the water, you'll need a safer surface. Metal roofs are a popular option.

Let's talk filters. There have been rare cases where people became ill from drinking rainwater that became contaminated after coming into contact with their roof, cistern, and other surfaces without being appropriately filtered (and even in some cases after being properly filtered). Typically, multiple filters are utilized to trap larger particles like leaves in the first stage, then smaller particles and finally purification. Regular testing of the water also helps avoid water-borne illnesses. Boiling water doesn't remove lead and other things you don't want in your drinking water. Harvesting rainwater for drinking is a personal choice and shouldn't be taken lightly. There are so many filtering devices on the market! Follow all recommended guidelines for testing and filtration.

If you're already familiar with rainwater harvesting and have your own rain barrel, good for you! Consider going even farther with the concept when you are able to do so. You can reuse greywater and harvest condensation, wind, snow, sun and shade, too! An excellent resource on these tactics is www.RainwaterHarvesting.com or the series of books such as [Rainwater Harvesting for Drylands and Beyond](#) by Brad Lancaster.

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