

Rainwater Harvesting in Colorado

New Legislation

Rainwater harvesting is an inexpensive way to obtain supplemental water for your outdoor watering needs. Colorado has two primary laws associated with the collection and use of rainwater. House Bill 16-1005 went into effect on August 10, 2016. This bill allows most Colorado homeowners to harvest rainwater from their rooftops. Senate Bill 09-080 was passed in 2009 and applies to landowners who own wells for domestic uses.

What does the new law mean for homeowners?

Since August 10, 2016, homeowners have been able to use up to two rain barrels to collect a maximum of 110 gallons of rainwater at a time. Collected rainwater can only be used to water outdoor lawns or ornamental gardens. It cannot be used indoors or for drinking water purposes. Contaminants from the roof such as leaves, insects or bird droppings make it unsafe for humans to drink.

If you live in an attached home, you must get permission from the other owners to use rain barrels. And, if you are a renter, you must get permission from your landlord. Home Owners' Associations cannot ban the use of rain barrels, but they may make reasonable restrictions on the placement or visual appearance of rain barrels.

How do the two laws differ?

The Colorado Division of Water Resources (DWR) regulates the provisions of Senate Bill 09-080. If your home is on property served with a domestic well, and if there is no water district or municipal water supply available to your property, contact the [DWR](#) to apply for a permit to collect rainwater from your roof. The permit allows you to use rainwater for the uses identified in your well permit. Please see the DWR web site to obtain Rainwater Collection permit application form GWS-78 for a Rooftop Precipitation Collection System, and to see if your property qualifies under all of the terms of this law.



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Rain Barrels

Rain barrels can be purchased at most hardware stores; check online as well because some stores offer free home delivery. Prices range from around one hundred to more than two hundred dollars. A diverter kit for the rain gutter downspout is also needed to complete the installation. The diverter is inserted into the downspout and a connecting hose attaches to the rain barrel. During a rain event, rain is diverted from the downspout to the barrel. When the barrel is full, rainwater is redirected back to the downspout and flows safely away from your home's foundation.

Rain barrels also have a spigot located near the bottom of the barrel. The spigot can be used to fill a watering can or to attach a soaker hose for slow release of water to a lawn or ornamental garden. The rain barrel should be elevated on a solid surface such as a concrete pad, concrete blocks, or sturdy stand. This will stabilize the barrel when full and provide additional pressure for the water to flow out.

Keep in mind that Colorado law requires a sealable lid on rain barrels. This is important to keep mosquitoes from breeding in the standing water. Harvested rainwater should only be used on ornamental plants and not for watering vegetables or fruits for human consumption. It also should not be used for pet consumption.

Winterize

Disconnect the system in winter and completely drain, otherwise, repeated freeze-thaw events could cause the barrel to develop cracks. Water weighs over eight pounds per gallon, so don't attempt to move the barrel until it has drained. Once empty, it can be cleaned and stored for next season's use.



Additional Questions?

Contact Adams County Health Department at 303.288.6816.

