



rainwater harvest

We spend so much time getting water away from our homes that we often fail to see rain as a valuable asset—delivered right to us for free. Excessive amounts of rainwater diverted into storm or sewer systems can damage local creeks, cause flooding, and impair water quality. But what if you could use that water to benefit your home or garden? You can—in a multitude of ways.

Roof rainwater can be stored for later use outdoors in the yard. Rain barrels are popular, but their small size makes them more educational than instrumental in minimizing your city-supplied water use. This is especially true in July through September, when weeks without rain mean your rain barrel doesn't refill. See the Seattle Public Utilities web page at www.seattle.gov/util (click on *Yard*, then *Natural Lawn & Garden Care*) for a list of retailers and use instructions, plus links to other rain barrel sources.

Cisterns are large tanks (commonly plastic, but also concrete and fiberglass) commonly used in agriculture to store large quantities of liquids, and are available locally through industrial pipe suppliers and farmers' co-ops. Cisterns store from several hundred to thousands of gallons of water, enough to significantly reduce or even eliminate the need to use municipal water for landscape purposes, especially when combined with the use of water-wise plants. Cisterns can offer the added benefit of helping regulate storm water runoff during the winter months, when landscape water isn't needed. By incorporating a valve in the base of the tank, rainwater captured during the winter can slowly and safely drain from the tank over time. To store water for summer use, simply close the valve. *The Texas Guide to Rainwater Harvest* provides an excellent overview of all aspects of rainwater harvest and storage: www.twdb.state.tx.us/publications/reports/RainHarv.pdf.

You can also put that roof water directly to use in your yard with a rain garden. These landscape elements feature plants that thrive in wet conditions coupled with soils that allow safe ground percolation. Rain gardens must be carefully designed and located to avoid flooding and causing damage to your home or neighboring properties. For more on rain gardens, rainwater harvest, and other rainwise landscaping practices, call (206) 615-0731.

