

## WHAT IS RAINWATER HARVESTING?

Rainwater harvesting is a method of collecting and storing rainwater for later use. Rainwater systems vary from simple rain barrels to complex pressurized systems with large cisterns.

## HOW CAN I USE HARVESTED RAINWATER?

Landscape irrigation is the most common use. You can also use rainwater to wash equipment, water indoor plants, and fill fountains.

## HOW MUCH IS THE REBATE?

It is \$0.50 per gallon of capacity for non-pressurized systems (no pump) and \$1.00 per gallon of capacity for pressurized systems (has a pump) up to half of the system cost. Rebate examples:

- 100 gallons, non-pressurized, \$200 cost = \$50 rebate
- 100 gallons, non-pressurized, \$50 cost = \$25 rebate
- 1,000 gallons, non-pressurized, \$1,500 cost = \$500 rebate
- 1,000 gallons, pressurized, \$1,500 cost = \$750 rebate
- 1,000 gallons, pressurized, \$2,500 cost = \$1,000 rebate
- 10,000 gallons, pressurized, \$20,000 cost = \$5,000 rebate

## DOES AUSTIN WATER NEED TO PRE-APPROVE MY APPLICATION BEFORE I BUY OR INSTALL MY SYSTEM?

If any new tank can hold 500 gallons or more, you must submit your application and design plan to Austin Water for pre-approval. Do not buy or install any part of the system until Austin Water approves the application. If every new tank will hold less than 500 gallons, you can buy and install the tanks before you send in your application.

## WHAT TYPES OF TANKS QUALIFY FOR THE REBATE?

Second-hand or self-made rain barrels do not qualify. Tanks must be finished and made specifically for rainwater collection. They may be hard or soft sided. All tanks must be water tight and made of solid, durable materials that are not prone to corrosion or decay. If you are not sure if the tank you're interested in will qualify, please call 512-974-2199.

## CAN I GET A REBATE FOR AN EXISTING RAINWATER SYSTEM?

No. Only new systems or expansions of existing systems are eligible. The goal of the program is to encourage people to install systems that create new water savings. It is not to replace existing systems.

## CAN COMMERCIAL CUSTOMERS QUALIFY FOR A REBATE IF THEY WILL USE THE RAINWATER SYSTEM TO GET WATER QUALITY CREDIT?

Yes, but only for the storage capacity that is above the amount used to qualify for the water quality credit. To learn about using rainwater harvesting as an Innovative Water Quality Control, see [Section 1.6.7](#) of the [Environmental Criteria Manual](#).

## Regulations & Permits

### DO I HAVE TO FOLLOW AUSTIN'S WATER RESTRICTIONS IF I USE RAINWATER?

Harvested rainwater is not subject to the [water restrictions](#). But, Austin Water staff may ask you to prove that you are using rainwater if you are not following your assigned watering schedule. You do have to follow the restrictions if you use potable water as a makeup supply in your rainwater system.

### WHAT SUBDIVISION AND ZONING RESTRICTIONS DO I HAVE TO FOLLOW?

All systems must follow subdivision and zoning regulations (*including setback and impervious cover limits*). Please contact the [Development Assistance Center](#) at 512-978-4000 or visit 505 Barton Springs Rd. to find out the restrictions for your property.

Systems must also meet any homeowner's association (HOA) requirements. Texas Property Code [Sec 202.007](#) says that HOAs may not prevent a property owner from installing a rainwater system or barrel. But, an HOA can regulate how it looks or where you locate it. Check with your HOA for guidelines.

### **DO I NEED ANY PERMITS TO INSTALL A RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEM?**

Pressurized systems must meet the [Cross Connection Control/Water Protection Program](#) requirements for [auxiliary water systems](#). Austin Water considers a rainwater system that uses a pump and has at least 500 gallons of capacity to be pressurized. Make sure to get all needed Cross Connection Control/Water Protection [permits](#).

Depending on your system, you may also need other permits. Please contact the [Special Services Division](#) at 512-972-1060 if you have questions. Austin Water will confirm that Special Services completed a final inspection before paying the rebate.

### **ARE THERE TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR INSTALLING RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEMS?**

The Texas Tax Code ([Section 151.355](#)) exempts rainwater harvesting equipment from [state sales tax](#). For more information, contact the [Texas Comptroller's office](#) at 800-252-5555.

### **WHY DOES A PRESSURIZED SYSTEM NEED A REDUCED PRESSURE ZONE BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSEMBLY AT THE CITY WATER METER IF THE SYSTEM DOES NOT CONNECT TO AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM OR PLUMBING?**

This prevents a possible cross-connection between the collected rainwater and the public water supply. Cross-connections can contaminate the water supply and threaten public health and safety. Even if you do not plan to connect to the public water supply, you must install and maintain proper backflow prevention. For more information, contact the [Special Services Division](#) at 512-972-1060 or see the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's [Consumer's Guide to Backflow Prevention in Texas](#).

### **IS A REDUCED PRESSURE ZONE BACKFLOW PREVENTION ASSEMBLY (RPZ) DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BACKFLOW PREVENTERS SUCH AS THE DOUBLE CHECK VALVE ON MY IRRIGATION SYSTEM?**

RPZs provide more protection than double check valves. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) considers auxiliary water systems, including pressurized rainwater harvesting systems, to be potential health hazards. Because of this, you must install an RPZ.

TCEQ considers irrigation systems without chemical additives to be non-health hazards. A lower level of protection, such as a double check valve, atmospheric vacuum breaker, or pressure vacuum breaker, is okay. If an irrigation system has chemical additives, TCEQ considers it a health hazard and requires an RPZ. For more information on premises hazards and required assemblies see the [Texas Administrative Code, 30 TAC §290.47\(f\)](#).

## **Selecting a Tank**

### **WHAT SIZE TANK SHOULD I INSTALL?**

The size of the storage tank that you will need depends on several things:

- Your area's precipitation rates,
- Your yard's water needs,
- The catchment surface area (*usually this is your roof*)
- Your personal design preferences, and
- Your budget.

The [Texas Water Development Board's RWH System Size Calculator](#) can help you decide what will work best for your property.

### **DOES THE CITY SELL RAIN BARRELS?**

No. The City of Austin stopped selling rain barrels in 2009.

### **WHERE CAN I BUY A RAINWATER COLLECTION TANK?**

The City of Austin does not endorse or recommend particular vendors. The [American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association](#) and [HarvestH2O](#) make vendor lists available. Also, an internet search might help with finding local or online vendors.

## **Installation & Maintenance**

### **HOW DO I INSTALL A RAIN BARREL?**

Place the barrel so that it can collect as much rain as possible from your roof. If you have gutters, shorten a downspout and reattach the end elbow joint to direct flow into the barrel. If you do not have gutters, place the barrel under a corner where two roof sections meet to create a valley. Position the barrel so that it can catch water from a light rain as well as from a forceful downpour. For more information, see these [installation instructions](#).

### **CAN I CONNECT RAIN BARRELS?**

Yes. That is a great way to increase storage capacity and deal with overflow. Connected barrels that have a pump and at least 500 gallons of capacity must meet [Cross Connection Control/Water Protection Program](#) requirements for auxiliary water sources.

### **WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT INSTALLING LARGE-SCALE RAINWATER SYSTEMS?**

The [Texas Water Development Board's Texas Manual on Rainwater Harvesting](#) is a good resource. The [American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association](#) is another good resource. Their Rainwater Catchment Design and Installation Standards offer valuable information. The City of Austin has not adopted the standards but they can serve as a useful reference.

### **HOW DO I MAINTAIN A RAINWATER HARVESTING SYSTEM?**

No matter how you use harvested rainwater, you will want to keep it as clean as possible. Maintenance is an ongoing duty that includes:

- trimming back trees near your roof;
- cleaning and repairing gutters, piping, filters, and roofs;
- purging and cleaning the first-flush system;
- watching tank levels; and
- maintaining pumps and other equipment.

### **HOW DO I KEEP MOSQUITOES FROM BREEDING?**

Screens can keep adult mosquitoes out of your tank but larvae can wash in from the gutters. To prevent breeding, install a first-flush system, empty the tank often, or add "mosquito dunks" to the water. Mosquito Dunks are a non-toxic bacterial larvicide available at most garden supply stores.