



Growing Guru



Nancy M. Eyster-Smith
neystersmith@bentley.edu
Waltham Garden Club



DEALING WITH DROUGHT



Gardening is so much easier when regular rainfall keeps the flower and vegetable beds well-watered and green all season long. However, it is much more likely that we will have to deal with drought conditions and be more conscious of how we use freshwater. There are ways to avoid using sprinklers, which waste a lot of water via evaporation and runoff. One of the best ways to have water for plants is to capture rainwater in rain barrels by diversion from a downspout. Kits are available, but I swap my long downspout for a short one with a flexible extension that reaches both my barrels. Then to disperse the water right where and when it is needed, I prefer using watering cans or milk jugs (or any container with a handle). The great thing about milk jugs is they aren't too heavy, they have a cap to prevent evaporation or spillage, and they are small enough to plunge into the top of my rain barrels for quick filling. I also use milk jugs to save the water from my basement dehumidifier, sometimes getting 1-2 gallons per day.

Many communities, including Waltham, offer discounted rain barrels twice a year from [Great American Rain Barrel](#), a company in Hyde Park, MA, that recycles food transport barrels. Very informative website with explanatory videos. These barrels work best if they are elevated.



Rain barrels are available with varying appearances, features, & costs. Here are websites for learning more about the best ones from:

- [Better Homes & Gardens](#)
- [Bob Vila](#)
- [The Spruce](#)
- [Treehugger](#)
- [World Water Reserve](#)

Other than "harvesting" rainwater when we have it, there are many other ways to deal with drought in the garden. Using lots of mulch will help retain water in the soil and will keep out weeds that compete with our plants for water. Using leaves as mulch also enhances the water-holding capacity of soil, while also adding nutrients as the leaves decay. Consider growing more drought tolerant plants, such as coneflower (*Echinacea*), blazing star (*Liatris*), and butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), all prairie favorites of mine. More plant suggestions can be found in [10 Tips for a Drought-Tolerant Garden](#). Also find a wealth of suggestions for [Dealing With Drought](#) with the important points of infrequent deep watering (where plant roots should be) and letting your lawn go dormant and brown in the summer.