

Let's Hear It For Rain Barrels!

By Shirley D. Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener

Recently, my property was blessed with one-quarter inch of rain (I live 5.5 miles south of Glen Rose)! Doesn't sound like much, but in light of the fact we are in the hottest part of the summer and rain showers are few and far between, it was an exciting event around my house (or rather around my rain barrels). You see, I have a plant shed that measures 12'x14'. Last summer my husband and I put gutters around it and added four 55-gallon rain barrels behind it. So, using the formula

A = (catchment area of building) **in my case 168 sq. ft.**

R = (inches of rain) **¼ inch of rain that fell**

G = (total amount of collected rainwater) **26.04 gallons I collected!!**

$(A) \times (R) \times (600 \text{ gallons}) / 1000 = (G)$

$168 \times .25 \times 0.62 = 26.04$

After some extensive research on the Internet, I discovered there are several ways of calculating rainfall but the above seems to be the easiest for me to use. If you don't have a calculator, here is another way to figure it. One of our Master Gardeners, Greg Marsh, uses a much simpler, yet as close, formula: take the square foot of your building (say 1000 sf) and if you get a 1-inch rain then divide that by one-half. You would collect a little more than 500 gallons on that 1-inch rain.

I fill gallon milk jugs from my rain barrels and water my many flowerpots with this water – saving the well water. I have drip irrigation on many of my flowerbeds and vegetable garden. Our goal should be to use as little water as possible and to use it wisely. So far this summer I have NOT run out of rainwater in my barrels. Just about the time I start to get low, we have another small rain that supplies me with more of the precious life-giving fluid.

If you are interested in installing rain barrels, there are numerous sites online that give you step-by-step instructions. I used plastic food-grade barrels that I bought at a local tractor/feed store for \$20 each. Once a year, the Somervell County Master Gardeners give a program on how to make a rain barrel. This is not rocket science and is an easy weekend project. If you do decide you are going to collect rainwater from your house or large barn, then you might want to contact the Somervell County Master Gardeners (somervellmg@gmail.com). Our organization has two Rainwater Specialists that are trained in doing just this and would be more than happy to talk to you and advise you on the best way to install a "system" on your building. There is no charge for this service.

