

Roll Out the Barrel

Like toasters, rain barrels should be functional and cool looking. The basic concept is simple: An elevated container captures water from your roof's downspout during a rain, which can then be used to water your petunias. Easy as toast. So how cool can it look? It's up to you, your ingenuity, and your bank account. If appearance is not a concern, buy a readily available \$30 kit and use an old plastic olive barrel. Or, if you want it to fit in with your post-and-beam, glass-walled house and show your neighbors that you know who Karim Rashid is, consider hiring an architect or designer to assist you. Even better: Utilize a kit for the first year as a prototype and then hire a designer to help you construct one that is specific to your needs.



1. Downspout: Yes, you're going to have to cut your downspout, so be careful.

2. Screening element: Located in the upper aperture, this will help keep leaves and bugs from clogging the system.

3. Barrel: Needs to be corrosion resistant (plastic, stainless, or galvanized steel, for example) and sized to hold enough water to allow you to water your petunias a few times in between rains. It also needs to look cool.

4. Overflow: The overflow is critical; and the barrel ought to be large enough to allow for excess water to exit the system in a controlled manner. Some designers divert the overflow into a rain garden.

5. Spigot: Allows you to control how and when you use the stored water.

6. Hose (or soaker hose): Carries the water to the petunias. The type of hose depends on the pressure of the system and what exactly you want the water to do.

7. Stand: The higher the barrel, the more pressure in the system. Many people chuck their rain barrels up on a couple of concrete blocks. You can do better than that.

8. Rain garden (in lieu of petunias): Typically composed of native wildflowers and grasses that are especially good at absorbing water, rain gardens look great and contribute significantly to the reduction of storm water runoff. If you go this route, consider hiring a landscape architect to help you properly size the garden and select species that are appropriate for your yard's microclimate. ■