

Harvesting H₂O in Roxborough

Up until May of 2016, Colorado's water law listed the state as the owner of any moisture in the atmosphere (unless otherwise stated), rain or snow, falling within its borders. Thus, it was even illegal to divert rainwater falling on any property, even residential, unless you had a water right that said you could. That included capturing rain off of roofs or rainwater harvesting.

Colorado has now joined the other 49 states in allowing rainwater harvesting. So now up to two 55-gallon rain barrels, with a combined capacity of 110 gallons, of rainwater can be collected and/or stored at each residence. So, at any one time you can have up to 110 gallons of water stored, thus the amount of times you collect it is not limited.

While useful for many things, rainwater is not as pure as you might think, so it's NOT safe to drink. Because rainwater passes through the atmosphere before falling to the ground, it can pick up any contaminants in the air. Similarly, the water that is collected from a roof's runoff can pick up toxic chemicals, dirt, insects, bacteria, and even bird droppings. Stored water is also subject to contamination. That's why it is important to NOT drink or prepare foods using rainwater.

What is rainwater harvesting?

Rainwater harvesting is the process of collecting rainwater, normally from roof runoff, to be stored in a rain barrel or cistern.

Is rainwater harvesting legal in Colorado?

Yes, as of May 2016 Colorado has joined the other 49 states in making limited amounts of rainwater collection legal.

Is there a limit to how much water I can collect?

Yes, at each residence, up to two 55-gallon rain barrels, with a combined capacity of 110 gallons, of rainwater can be collected and/or stored.

Why was rainwater harvesting ever illegal in Colorado?

Up until May of 2016, Colorado's water law listed the state as the owner (unless otherwise stated) of any moisture in the atmosphere, rain or snow, falling within its borders. Thus, it was even illegal to divert rainwater falling on any property, even residential, unless you had a water right that said you could. That included capturing rain off of roofs or rainwater harvesting.

What is rainwater harvesting used for?

It is normally used outside for watering landscapes and can be used indoors for watering plants. Rainwater should never be integrated into your indoor plumbing needs as it is not always safe to bathe or shower in, clean or cook with, or drink.

Why is rainwater NOT safe to drink?

While useful for many things, rainwater is not as pure as you might think, so it's NOT safe to drink. Because rainwater passes through the atmosphere before falling to the ground, it can pick up any contaminants in the air. Similarly, the water that is collected from a roof's runoff can pick up toxic chemicals, dirt, insects, bacteria, and even bird droppings, on its way to the rain barrel. Stored water is also subject to contamination. That's why it is important to NOT drink or prepare foods using rainwater.

Can harvested rainwater become polluted?

If pollution does occur, it most likely originates in the rain barrel or cistern itself. That's because stored water, especially uncovered, can breed algae, mosquitoes, bacteria, viruses, and can also be contaminated by humans. In rare instances, contaminants may even leach from the storage container's walls.