



**SAN MATEO COUNTYWIDE**  
**Water Pollution Prevention Program**  
Clean Water. Healthy Community.

## **TIPS for installing and using your rain barrel**

Rain Barrels have many advantages, but there are a few health concerns you should be aware of when installing your rain barrel.

- **USE DIRECTLY ON LANDSCAPING ONLY.** San Mateo County requires that rain barrels **must not** be connected to any other supply water system, **including sprinkler systems that are connected to your home's water supply**. This is to prevent the water from your barrel, which is not treated, from mixing with the public water supply. The best way to prevent this is to **only** hook a garden hose, or isolated drip irrigation system, to the outlet of your barrel and use it for watering your landscaping **directly**. Also, if you choose to fill your rain barrel with water from the garden hose for storage and use later, never put the hose inside the barrel, as unintended suction can contaminate the water in your home and the public water supply.
- **ONLY DIVERT RAIN WATER INTO THE BARREL.** Do not divert waste water from appliances or other sources to your barrel. This water is considered "Grey Water" and can contain bacteria that will flourish inside the barrel over time.
- **DO NOT DRINK WATER FROM YOUR RAIN BARREL.** Water from your roof is not safe to drink, but is fine to water your yard. It is **not** recommended to water vegetable gardens with your rain barrel.
- **PREVENT MOSQUITOS.** Make sure your barrel has a tight-fitting, fine-mesh screen at the point in which water enters the barrel. The screen should be maintained and checked on a regular basis. This is to prevent your barrel from becoming a nesting site for mosquitos. This is very important, as West Nile Virus has occurred in San Mateo County.

When in doubt, email questions to [pollutionprevention@smcgov.org](mailto:pollutionprevention@smcgov.org)

