

# Catching the Raindrops

By Adrienne Roberto, Member, Harrison Township Environmental Commission

The Harrison Township Environmental Commission would like to offer some easy ways to help residents make sure they have plenty of water for the summer and help the environment by reducing storm water runoff.

Consider using a rain barrel which may be placed below the downspout of a gutter and allows you to catch water as it pours off the roof. Rain barrels can help homeowners save money on water bills, reduce demand on public water supplies, and use the water instead of it going into the storm sewer or causing soil erosion. By collecting the rainwater, you can control the moisture levels around your home. Plants thrive on the pH neutral soft oxygenated water, unlike municipal water that contains ammonia, fluoride, and chlorine.

A typical rain barrel holds 50 to 100 gallons and has a faucet at the bottom where a hose can be attached for easy use. Barrels can be easily linked so that the overflow from one barrel runs into the next. When the barrels are full, the overflow is directed back through the downspout and down its normal route. The overflow can be routed into a low lying or depressed area or a rain garden so that the water can recharge into the ground rather than flow into the storm sewer. It is easy to set up a rain barrel to collect water either as a do-it-yourself project or as a purchased pre-assembled kit. Southwest Florida Water Management District has clear step by step instructions at their website to set up a rain barrel collection system at [www.swf.wmd.state.fl.us](http://www.swf.wmd.state.fl.us). The internet is a good resource to find an abundance of information about rain barrels and suppliers.

Another way to reduce runoff and capture precious rainwater in your yard is to plant a rain garden. A rain garden is both beautiful and functional because it is located in a place where it will catch runoff during rain showers and naturally infiltrate into the soil. Creating a rain garden is a simple and inexpensive project and can be less than 100 square feet and as large as 300. The success of a rain garden depends on choosing the right shrubs and flowers for the conditions in that location, the type of soil and the amount of sun or shade. Native plants work best because they thrive without a lot of care, extra water or fertilizer. For more information on native plants and building rain gardens, including a manual with suggestions on plants and various garden designs, visit the Native Plant Society of New Jersey website at [www.npsnj.org](http://www.npsnj.org).

By collecting rain in barrels and creating rain gardens, you can protect the rivers and streams from runoff pollution and divert the rainwater from the municipal storm drain systems. For more information about Harrison Township's Environmental Commission and other articles on the environment, visit the Commission's page on the Harrison Township's website at [www.harrisontwp.us](http://www.harrisontwp.us).