April 22 is the 49th anniversary of Earth Day. This year, celebrate the water planet by using water outdoors the way Mother Nature intended and making every drop count this spring planting season. From selecting regionally appropriate blooms to knowing when and how much to water, you can be a water-saving force of nature this Earth Day with a lush and low-maintenance landscape.

- **Watch your water budget.** If you’re designing a new landscape or rethinking your current one, the WaterSense Water Budget Tool ([https://www.epa.gov/watersense/water-budget-tool](https://www.epa.gov/watersense/water-budget-tool)) can help you plan for water efficiency. With inputs such as zip code, yard size, and plant types, you can determine if your landscape design uses an appropriate amount of water for your climate.

- **Localize your landscape.** Think outside the flower box by choosing plants native to your region, which require less water to supplement normal rainfall. Not only will these local beauties thrive in your soil and climatic conditions, but their low maintenance and increased pest resistance will save you both water and time.

- **Play zone defense.** Assign areas of your landscape different “hydrozones” based on sun and shade exposure, soil and plant types, and type of sprinklers. Then adjust your irrigation system or watering schedule based on those zones’ specific watering needs. That way, you’ll avoid overwatering some areas or under watering others.

- **Mulch to maintain moisture.** Give your landscape a mulch makeover and reuse your yard debris by topping off flowerbeds with dried leaves, grass clippings, or tree bark chips. Adding a layer of mulch around shrubs and flowers will help retain moisture, inhibit weed growth, moderate soil temperature, and prevent erosion so you can spend less time watering and more time watching your garden grow.

- **Timing is everything.** Know how much water your landscape actually needs before you set your sprinkler. It’s generally best to water lawns and landscapes in the early morning, because significant amounts of water can be lost due to evaporation during the heat of the day.

- **Tune up your system.** Homes with clock timer irrigation systems use about 50 percent more water outdoors than homes without irrigation systems. Inspect irrigation systems to prevent additional water waste due to incorrect programming, a sprinkler head pointed in the wrong direction, or a leak.

- **Look for the label.** If you have an irrigation system that uses a clock timer, consider upgrading to a WaterSense labeled controller. Labeled models act like a thermostat for your lawn, using local weather data to determine when and how much to water, reducing waste and improving plant health.

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Is the water coming out of your taps cloudy or milky?

Drinking water can sometimes appear ‘milky’ or ‘cloudy’ when first drawn from the tap. This is usually caused by air and generally disappears after a short time.

If your water is white, milky or cloudy, fill a glass with water and leave it to stand for a few minutes. If the cloudiness clears from the bottom of the glass upwards, this shows the cloudy appearance has been caused by air. The tiny air bubbles will rise to the surface and the cloudy appearance will disappear.

Rest assured, cloudy water caused by tiny air bubbles in the water is not harmful to health. If, however, the water does not clear in this way, please contact our Water Quality department at (360) 848-2135.

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Be a Leak Detective

Did you know that easy-to-fix water leaks account for more than one trillion gallons of water wasted each year in U.S. homes? In fact, the average household leaks more than 10,000 gallons of water per year, or the amount of water it takes to wash 270 loads of laundry, and could be costing you an extra 10 percent on your water bills.

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EPA WaterSense

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Listen to Your Mother (Nature) This Earth Day

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Using Rain Barrels in Northwest Gardens

CONSERVING WATER—improving the efficiency of its use—is one important way to address local water needs and ensure adequate supplies in the future. Finding other sources of water can complement conservation. Rainwater is one source, and systems designed to catch and store rainwater take many forms. Rain barrels are one rainwater storage option.

What are Rain Barrels?
They’re systems designed to capture and store rainwater coming off a roof, usually attached to a downspout. They consist of a storage container (usually plastic), a system for diverting downspout water into the barrel, and an overflow that returns to the downspout or diverts water safely away from the house to percolate into the soil.

They should also have the following:
• Durable, rot resistant construction.
• Opaque containers to discourage bacteria/algae growth.
• Kid, pet, and pest-proof openings.
• Valves for hose attachment.
• Screens and/or filters to keep debris out of the barrel.

What are Some Benefits of Rain Barrels?
• Flexibility. As water storage needs change, the number of barrels in a system can follow suit.
• Happier plants. Rainwater is free of the additives (e.g., chlorine and fluoride) in tap water that plants don’t need or want. Rainwater is also slightly acidic, helping plants access soil nutrients. However, certain roofs can affect water quality.
• Reduced stormwater runoff. Rain barrels can divert a limited amount of stormwater from roofs, reducing strains on urban creeks and storm systems.
• Some water savings. Rain barrels can save water, but savings depend on the storage capacity of the system and proper use and maintenance.

Where Can I Find a Rain Barrel?
Rain barrels can be bought pre-assembled, as kits, or homemade.

Skagit PUD sells fully assembled, ready to install, 55-gallon barrels for $60 plus tax. Call (360) 424-7104 to check availability.

How much water can I catch?
Puget Sound averages about 3 feet of rain per year, but two-thirds of it falls from November to March. Most areas in the region average less than 2 inches total rainfall for July and August. To determine the amount of rain your roof catches, multiply your home’s width by its length (in feet) to estimate its footprint. Then estimate the portion of this area that drains to the downspout you’ll be using to catch your rain. The following formula will give a rough estimate of how much rain you can catch:

\[
\text{Rain caught (gallons)} = (\text{inches of rain}) \times 0.6 \times (\text{portion of building footprint})
\]

For example, if your home’s footprint is 1,400 square feet, and you want to know the amount of water that comes from a 1/4” (.25”) rain event, you would solve the following:

\[
\text{Rain caught (gallons)} = (0.25) \times (0.6) \times (1,400), \text{ or } 210 \text{ gallons.}
\]

However, storage is limited to the capacity of your system. Added capacity helps your system weather the dry spells. Capacity and cost are directly related: decide how much you want to spend for saving!

*One inch of rain falling on a square foot of surface yields approximately .6 gallons of water.*