

RAIN BARREL More and more rain barrels are seen around neighborhoods in Iredell County. They're easy to install on existing down spouts from gutters or outbuildings.

However, there's a lot to consider in a rain barrel - it does help conserve natural resources and it will surely put water where it's needed; but it may need some thought, too. First of all, there's the homeowner's non-professional approach to rainwater: Put on galoshes and take an umbrella out in the rain to see just where rainwater falls -- or ends.

A rain barrel can be purchased or made. Some of the features to look for are:

- bug resistant screens
- brass spigots
- tight-fitting lid (prevents mosquitos)
- outlet for overflow
(extra water doesn't seep into the area
to damage the house's foundation, for
instance.)
- overflow container, if desired
- downspout connector, if desired



Or some might like a cut off valve on the gutter; and especially be sure there is a hard surface under the rain barrel, because when it's full, it's heavy. But the secret is, even 1/4" of rain will almost fill a barrel if the gutters take it properly from the roof(s.) And you can see below where a second barrel had to be added for the "overflow" once the gutters were readjusted.



RAIN GARDEN is another thought. Mostly water will be purified or taken advantage of during a storm, but it will slow down water run-off and be attractive at the same time. Your agricultural office has the details, but basically, the idea would be to locate the garden at least ten feet from the house, to prevent moisture problems. Water can come into the garden through a grassy or trench area. An oval shape garden points toward the outflow, 4-8 inches below the level of the ground. A waterway of grass would lead from the garden to the natural run off of the lot. Water should not remain in the garden for more than two or three days. In order to improve drainage, eight inches down, a layer of compost and soil helps or rocks may be needed in the bottom.

And then there is what to plant in the rain garden. You may find three or more zones of "wetness:" Hardly any water where it first enters the rain garden (wet and then dry,) more water in the center, and the most water being at the (lowest) outfall. Around the edges, of course, dryness would prevail.

The flowers should always be perennials. First decide trees, shrubs, flowers (short and tall,) or grasses. Of the flowers you'll want, ones that come up year after year. And do you want those to be tall or short? Either way is fine, but know, or ask, ahead of time, so there will be fewer surprises -- and some continuity. Shorter native perennials are two to three feet tall! The best starting point would be short perennials and grasses. Besides, if your flower garden (plus grasses) fails, shrubs can always take its place.

Wet, then dry would include: Mountain mints, small Milkweeds (the butterflies will love you,) common blue Amsonia, a short Aster, purple Coneflower, hardy Ageratum, common Sundrops (be sure they're 18-24", because there are many,) orange Coneflower, or a Coneflower with three lobed leaves (short,) like Brown Eyed Susans and anything you see along roadways, like the short, golden ragwort.

At the edges, where things tend to dry out, we like Lyre-leaved Sage, and the Green and Gold (less than 1 foot tall) native groundcover.

The wettest area (holding water longest) includes blue flags, (with little Crested Iris on the sides--they're short and don't need so much water,) blue eyed grass (also short,) and cardinal flower. Our favorite is the common mallow (white with red center, but it's taller, 3-4')

And between the flowers, short grasses -- maybe almost half grass and half flowers, for a meadowy feeling; plus they look so good come winter: Pink Muhly Grass (M. capillaries, 1-3 feet tall,) and Little Bluestem (3'.) And for the driest spots, Purple Love Grass.

Of course, we always plant with compost and soil and mulch the top. This may sound like a real challenge for gardeners, but remember you can always plant shrubs or trees, if this does not work for you.

Shrubs and trees for wet or dry spots -- see the **TREE** section.