

Rain barrels: Go green — one drop at a time

Rain barrels can be plain or elaborate, as shown here, created by Severna Park artist Jodi Roberts. Roberts has donated barrels and other custom artwork to support community fundraisers and area schools. "If you can hold it still, I'll paint it," Roberts said. For more information visit, www.offthewallpainting.com.



Courtesy photo

Gardeners often look for ways to compost, conserve, reduce and reuse. Rain barrels can help save water and money, while helping the environment.

A rain barrel connected to a downspout collects roof runoff of the first flush — the most critical rain often loaded with pollutants — and then slowly releases the water to a garden or shallow dry well area. Diverting water from storm drains reduces erosion, pollution and contaminated runoff into streams and the Chesapeake Bay.

Reused rain water saves money on utility bills by using harvested water for outdoor irrigation, to water a garden or plants, fill ponds or wash a car. The nitrogen-rich rain water has fertilizing properties for plants.

According to Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center in Millersville, for every 1000 square feet of roof line, one inch of rain equals about 632 gallons of water. Reusing this "soft water" reduces the impact of traditional lawn watering that uses nearly 40 percent of total household summer water use.

Rain barrels can be made of plastic, ceramic or oak, in sizes from 25 to 80 gallons, and are widely available.

For more information on rain barrels, sustainability, and conservation tips check out: Arlington Echo Outdoor Education Center at www.arlingtonecho.net; the City of Annapolis, Department of Neighborhood and Environmental Programs (DNEP) at www.SustainableAnnapolis.gov or www.annapolis.gov; or Anne Arundel County at www.aacounty.gov.

— Staff report