



Rethinking Yard Care

A SERIES OF WATER QUALITY FACT SHEETS FOR RESIDENTIAL AREAS

A wooden rain barrel was a familiar sight in many backyard gardens at the turn of the century. Its purpose was simple – collect rainfall running off a roof and store it for future use. Often, that use would have been watering flowers and garden plants when the weather turned dry.

Turn-of-the-century gardeners knew by experience what chemistry teaches us today: rain water can be better for plants than water pumped from the ground or piped through a city water main. It's not chlorinated, fluoridated or loaded with dissolved salts. And, rain water is mildly acidic, which helps plants take up important minerals from the soil.

Today, electric well pumps and city water pressure make storing water in rain barrels seem like more work than it's worth. Nevertheless, we might reflect upon the past and consider what the rain barrel can symbolize.

An old idea reconsidered

A rain barrel reminds us of a simpler, in some ways more sensible, approach to yard care. It shouldn't imply that conscientious people must go out, buy a rain barrel, and place it under a downspout. But there are applications today of what we might call a rain-barrel ethic.

A rain-barrel ethic suggests an awareness of personal actions and their effects on the environment, with the knowledge that simple and natural methods are sometimes the most effective ways to care for your yard. In practice, such an ethic could mean the difference between clean and polluted lakes and streams.

The Yard Care Series

This publication describes an approach to yard care that is both practical and environmentally sound. It offers ideas to consider around your home and in your community. Look inside for information on:

- ✓ water quality problems originating at home
- ✓ the environmental consequences of lawn and garden chemicals
- ✓ ways to reintroduce natural processes
- ✓ practical tips for protecting water quality around the home

Other fact sheets in the *Yard Care and the Environment* series explain environmentally sound actions in greater detail. In some cases, the suggestions can actually make your property easier to manage or more inviting. All promote a healthier environment and better water quality.

The old-fashioned rain barrel can symbolize a simpler, more sensible approach to yard care.

