



How-to guide for allotments

Rainwater harvesting systems



Introduction

The North West is home to more than 1,300 allotments and communal gardens, where our region's residents grow a wealth of their own produce, from carrots to cucumbers, parsnips to potatoes.

A lot of time and effort goes into these endeavours, not to mention a lot of water and with changing weather patterns we're seeing much less rainfall during the summer months, often followed by periods of heavier, more extreme rainfall. So, learning to cope with these changes is becoming even more challenging for gardeners.

One way we can all help is to manage the rainfall we do have by capturing and storing for rainwater for dry periods.

So, here is our guide to rainwater harvesting for allotments where you'll find out how to install water butts and tanks, what you need to do to keep them clean and other useful tips and tricks for keeping your allotment staying bloomin' lovely all year round.

Collecting rainwater

Rainwater harvesting comes with many benefits, not only are you saving and re-using water, but rainwater is also much better for your flowers and vegetables.

There is a wide range of rainwater harvesting systems available from water butts to IBC tanks. All providing the same service, the only difference is how much water they can hold. Typically, your average water butt holds 200 litres of water, that's the equivalent of over 700 cups of tea held in one water butt!

Most water butts come with attachments that fit to your gutter's downpipe. These divert the rainwater into the butt until it fills, allowing any excess water to flow away as normal. However, if you don't already have a structure to connect to, then you may need to build one.

Water butts – getting started

Fitting a water butt may appear to be complicated, but it's actually a lot easier than you'd expect.



You will need the following items to install a water butt:

- Spirit level
- Saw
- Water butt
- Stand/bricks
- Diverter kit
- Screwdriver
- Pen/pencil
- Drill
- Tape measure

What do you get in a diverter kit?

- Rainwater diverter
- Flexible hose
- Tank connector



Please make sure you follow the diverter kit instructions as kits may vary, and don't worry if you have a round or square downpipe there are attachments for both.

Always remember, your safety comes first, be careful when using tools.



Kate Shaw, Chair of Brighton Grove Allotment Association, said: "We've been trying to promote water collection here for a few years, and now, with the water butts in place, we're hoping to rely significantly less on mains water. Rainwater is better for vegetable crops and using as much as we can will also save on bills."

How to fit a water butt: Step-by-step

1



First, you'll need to find a flat surface near a gutter downpipe. Use a spirit level to check as this is where your water butt will sit.

2



You will need a stand or some bricks to sit your water butt on, so there is enough room for a watering can. Place your water butt on the stand before the next step.

3



Mark the height of the water butt on the downpipe. Then measure 3 cm above this point, this is where you will want to cut with a saw.

4



Attach the rainwater diverter fitting to the cut section of the downpipe. Make sure you follow the diverter kit instructions.

5



Make sure you secure a bracket to your wall and downpipe. You will need a drill and a screwdriver for this step.

6



Attach the flexible hose from the diverter fitting to the water butt. You can cut this down to size if it is too long using a saw. **03**

How to fit a water butt: Step-by-step

7



Finally, pop the water butt lid back on and there you have it. You are now ready to start collecting that lovely rainwater.

8



Fill up your watering can and give your plants a nice drink of water. Don't forget to water make sure you water your plants at either dawn or dusk to minimise evaporation.



For more information watch our step-by-step guide on how to fit a water butt.

How to fit an IBC tank: Step-by-step

What is an IBC tank?

Intermediate bulk containers (also known as IBC tanks) are large containers built for a variety of purposes, one being the storage of liquids, primarily water. Many IBCs are reused or repurposed and can hold large quantities of rainwater. Perfect for giving your lovely flowers and vegetables a refreshing drink.



How do you fit an IBC tank?

Firstly, you'll need a structure with a downpipe to connect to, such as a shed or garage, if you don't have a structure fitted with gutters and a down pipe there are ways you can build your own.

Here's how you can fit an IBC on your allotment:

1. Set up – check you have everything you need:

- Spirit level
- Saw
- IBC tank
- Stand/bricks
- Diverter kit
- Screwdriver
- Pen/pencil
- Drill
- Tape measure
- Gloves

2. Make sure you have a downpipe you can connect your IBC to, if you don't already have a pre-existing structure to connect to, you can either create and build your own structure, or if you have limited space, you can install a funnel to your IBC tank to collect just as much water as you would with a down pipe connected.

How to fit an IBC tank: Step-by-step

3. Make sure your tank is placed on a flat surface and raised high enough to fit a watering can or bucket under the tap.
4. Connecting your IBC tank to the downpipe can seem like a difficult thing to do, however there are different ways you can do this. You can either directly fit the downpipe into the top of the tank or do the same process you would with your water butt:
 - Mark above the IBC tank on the downpipe and measure 3 cm above this point, this is where you will want to cut with a saw.
 - Attach the rainwater diverter fitting to the cut section of the downpipe. Make sure you follow the diverter kit instructions and don't forget to secure the downpipe back in place.
 - Attach the flexible hose from the diverter fitting to the IBC tank.
5. You can also connect additional tanks to each other by connecting a hose. Make sure the hose is fitted higher on the IBC tank directly fitted to the downpipe to ensure you are filling it with as much water as possible.



How do you care for an IBC tank?

To make sure your IBC tank is cared for, you will need to make sure you clean gutters regularly for any debris such as leaves and moss. Filters can also be fit into to the diverter on your down pipe.

During cold months in winter, check on your IBC tank to make sure you clear any snow or ice to prevent additional weight from causing damage. If you are concerned about freeze-thraw you can also wrap your tanks with waterproof, insulated jacket, too.

How long do IBC tanks typically last?

With proper care and maintenance, these IBCs can have a lifespan ranging from 5 to 10 years or more

Water butts help boost crops and conserve resources at Birkdale allotments



Dozens of water butts have been installed at Birkdale allotments in Southport to help growers make the most of the rainfall, reduce their use of potable water, and keep their costs down.

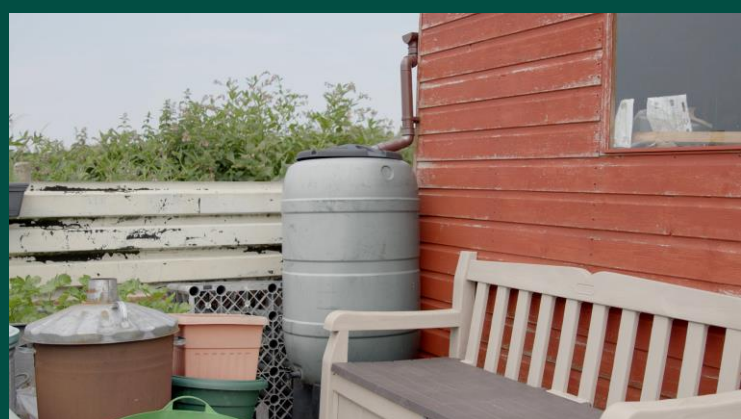
The site, on Moss Road in Halsall, is owned by Sefton Council and is home to 137 plots, where people grow everything from carrots and cauliflower, to strawberries and salads. It is also used by a local food bank, mental health charity, and school and scout groups, to give children and adults the chance to learn about growing their own food and get hands-on.

Birkdale allotments now have 20 large water butts have been installed across the site with each butt storing 1,000 litres of rainfall, so, when they fill up over the coming weeks and months, growers will have a plentiful supply for their plants.

Using this stored rainfall instead of potable water from the taps could have a significant impact on the site's consumption, and therefore its costs.

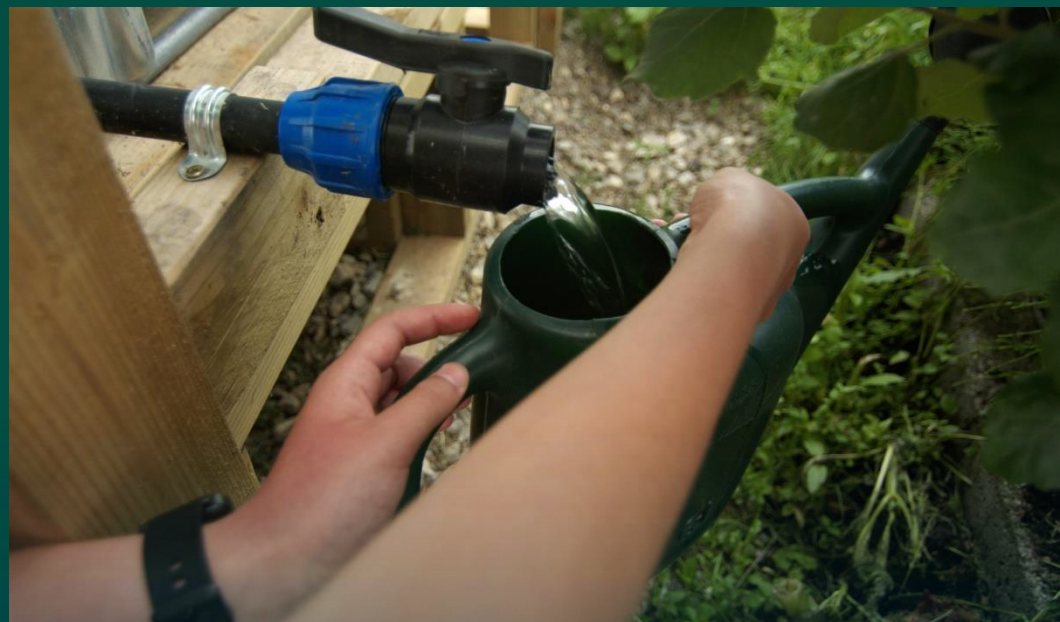
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Ian Singleton, Chair of Birkdale Allotments Society, said: “Not only will the collecting stations collect a considerable amount of rainfall, we now also have the outside room for group visits and new storage space. It's transformed the site in more ways than just providing water. The belief in us and our journey in bringing the community together, including through our food bank, mental health and youth plots, is fantastic.”



**Making the most of your
allotment?**





FAQs

Why do plants prefer rainwater?

Whatever the weather, your plants will need a nice refreshing drink of water and although our tap water is of the highest quality, plants simply don't need perfectly clean drinking water.

According to the RSH, *“Rainwater is also better for your plants as it often has a lower pH. The minerals that are sometimes found in mains water, especially in hard water areas can raise the pH of your root zone, which can affect the nutrient availability. Rainwater is especially good for ericaceous plants such as azaleas.”*



How do I take care of my water butt?

Cleaning your water butts regularly will help prevent them from getting smelly or from carrying diseases.

The best time to clean your water butt is on a dry, calm day. Here are our tips to cleaning your water butt, make sure you have your rubber gloves on before you start:

1. Drain out any water in your water butt (check if you can re-use this water), disconnect and carefully rotate your empty water butt onto its side.
2. Scrub the inside and outside with a coarse brush.
3. Rinse the debris and dirt away (check if you can collect and re-use this water).
4. Put your water butt back in place and reconnect.
5. Make sure you check your gutters aren't clogged with fallen leaves or moss.

To prevent your water butts from getting dirty you can fit filters to the diverter on your down pipe and double check your water butt lid is well fitted to prevent debris falling into the water and for the safety of animals and children.

If you have multiple water butts, you can rotate them to keep stores fresh, too.

Do United Utilities sell water butts?

Yes, we do. You can visit our online shop for our range of discounted water butts. We offer the following types of water butts:

- Slimline 100 Litre Water Butt Kit
- 200 Litre Cloudburst Water Butt Kit
- 227 Litre Harcostar Water Butt Kit



For more information visit our online shop for our range of discounted water butts.

FAQs

What other ways can I save water?

There are many other ways you can save water not only on your allotment but also at home, too. Here are our top tips:

- **Use a watering can;** give your flowers a drink from a watering can instead of a hose pipe. Water flow is also slower, reducing the chance of water running away before your plants can absorb it.
- **Where and when to water;** watering your garden during dawn and dusk or once it is shaded will help minimise evaporation and will help reduce strain on flowers. Make sure you water your plants closely to the roots and don't forget to check the weather forecast before you water your garden, too.
- **Water retaining crystals;** use water retaining crystals on your potted plants and hanging baskets to keep them hydrated for even longer.
- **Types of plants;** drought resistant plants like lavender, rosemary and succulents are great for sunspots and require much less water. Planting the right flowers in your garden can make a huge difference on your garden and the water you use.
- **Leave your lawn;** A hosepipe or sprinkler uses 540 litres of water per hour. Don't over water your lawn, grass is hardy and can bounce back quickly after some lovely rainfall.

- **Use mulch;** mulch your soil with bark or straw to retain water in your flower beds, it can also help slow down weed growth and prevent pesky slugs and snails.



- **Re-use old items to collect water;** even if you have installed a water butt on your allotment, you can still save even more rainwater by re-using old items such as buckets or even bathtubs to collect rainwater (or even plant some flowers in).



For more information watch our save water in the garden playlist.

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Water for the North West