



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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HAVE YOU MOSQUITO-PROOFED YOUR RAIN BARREL?



Image Credit: CDC



Photo by Wendy Diaz

Water rationing, due to prolonged drought, has resulted in creative ways to conserve water. Rain barrels are a popular way for people to capture and store rain for various watering needs. This guidance document is to remind gardeners and homeowners that their rain barrel requires some light maintenance so they continue to operated optimally as a useful supplemental storage for our watering needs and to prevent them from becoming a health and safety hazard.

Mosquitoes need standing water to complete their life cycle and require at least 10 to 14 days to complete the aquatic stage of their life cycle. Modifying or eliminating breeding sites is the only long-term solution to severe mosquito problems. To prevent adult female mosquitoes from laying eggs in your rain barrel some routine maintenance is recommended.

General Information:

- It is always best to use a container that has been designed specifically to be a rain barrel, as opposed to a makeshift trash can, that are designed to keep bugs and debris out.
- Use mosquito proof screening, the same size mesh you find on your window screens, to seal openings that could allow mosquitoes into your rain barrel.
- Keep the barrel lid and connectors sealed tight to keep out vermin, especially check opening where rain gutters flow into your barrel.
- Be sure to regularly inspect your rain barrel to remove any water that could pool up on the outside creating a place for mosquito breeding.

Basic Maintenance:

1. Drain your rain barrels regularly

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2. Clean gutters of debris so they drain well and do not accumulate water.
3. Wash and flush gutters annually.
4. Check mosquito screens periodically to make sure they are secure without gaps and are not blocked by debris. Replace the screens if they have any holes.
5. Seasonally drain sediment-laden water through the bottom valve especially after pollen season.
6. Check gutter connections after intense rainfall or storms for damage.
7. Bleach is not recommended if you will use your rainwater for multiple purposes other than watering plants (fishpond or bird bath). There are less harmful methods available that are environmentally friendly.
 - a. A few teaspoons of vegetable oil in the water will suffocate mosquito larvae on the surface of the water.
 - b. Mosquito dunks in the rain barrel water. This solid commercial formulation is a larvaecide and contains the bacteria (Bti, *Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*) and it kills feeding mosquito larvae but does not harm humans, animals or plants.

Basic Safety:

1. Label your rain barrel to remind others that the water is for non-potable water use only and **Do Not Drink**.
2. Rinse thoroughly if you bleach your barrel to remove algae.