



# Rainwater use in and around the home



Our Water Our Future

A Victorian Government initiative



# Why use rainwater?

**Using rainwater in and around your home is an easy and effective way to conserve Victoria's precious water supplies and reduce the amount of mains water you use.**

**This pamphlet provides information about how you can safely use rainwater and make water savings around the home.**



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Department of Human Services

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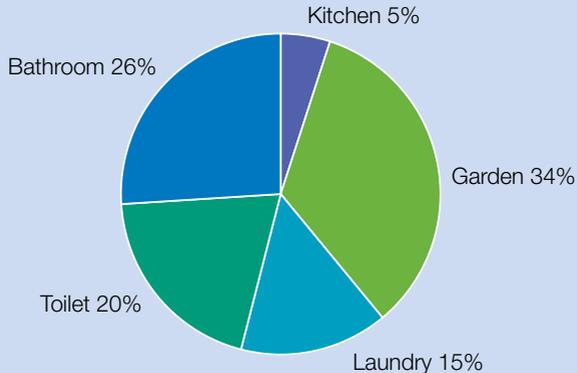
# What can I use rainwater for?

Rainwater can be used for a wide range of purposes in and around your home.

Using rainwater for toilet flushing, clothes washing, bathing and showering make the biggest contribution to saving water, as they use a high volume of water all year round. This means the water levels in your rainwater tank will be regularly drawn down, allowing more rainfall to be captured and used.

Garden watering is also recommended. It uses a high volume of water during the warmer months of the year. However, only using rainwater for garden watering means that your rainwater tank is more likely to fill and overflow during wet months, reducing the amount of water you can collect to use.

## Typical Domestic Water Use



Source: Rathjen et al. 2003

Simply placing a tap on a rainwater tank can supply rainwater for outdoor uses such as garden watering, car washing, or topping-up your swimming pool or spa.

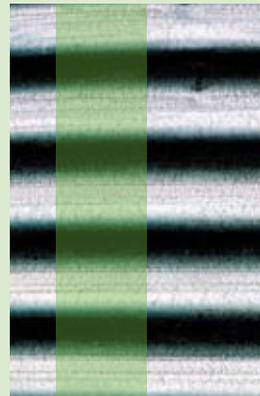
Using water indoors for toilet flushing, clothes washing, bathing, showering, and in your hot water service will require additional plumbing and a pump.

# Can I drink rainwater?

If a mains drinking water supply is available it is not recommended that you use rainwater for drinking and food preparation. The quality of water in household rainwater tanks is generally not as reliable as mains supplies, which have been treated to a level to ensure they are safe for human consumption.

The volume of water used in the average kitchen is typically the lowest of all household water uses. Therefore using rainwater for purposes other than drinking and food preparation will still maximise water saving opportunities.

If you want more information on the use of rainwater for drinking and food preparation, contact the Department of Human Services (contact details at the end of this booklet).

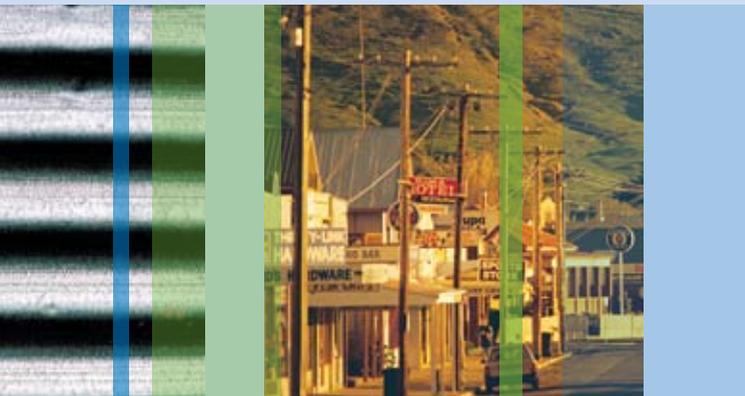


# How do I manage my rainwater quality?

Simple preventive measures are the best way to improve and manage your rainwater quality. It is recommended that you:

- Stop leaf litter and debris from entering the tank, as this can cause water discolouration, odour and encourage the growth of microorganisms. A leaf litter guard or a leaf diverter can be used in areas with overhanging trees.
- Prevent things like bird droppings and dust building up on the roof and washing into the tank when it rains. A device that diverts the first flush of rainwater can prevent these contaminants from entering the tank.
- Prevent animals and insects such as mosquitoes from entering the tank by sealing or covering the tank, and screening any openings with mesh. This will also ensure children cannot access the tank.
- Maintain and inspect your roof and gutters every 6 months. Tanks should be checked for sludge accumulation every 2–3 years, and cleaned if necessary. Professional tank cleaners are available in some areas (contact details at the end of this booklet).

Rainwater shouldn't require treatment or disinfection if it is not being used for drinking and food preparation.



# What else do I need to know?

## Tank size

You should choose a tank that will give you the best return on your investment. The tank size you need will depend on your planned uses of rainwater, the size of your roof, and the rainfall in your area. Contact your water authority or a rainwater tank supplier for further advice (contact details at the end of this booklet).

## Permits and approvals

You do not need an approval to use rainwater in and around your home, but you should contact your local council before you install your rainwater tank to check if there are any building or planning regulations that must be met.

If you are installing your rainwater tank to meet the 5 Star Standard for new homes then specific requirements apply (for example you must use rainwater for toilet flushing). Contact the Plumbing Industry Commission for further information (contact details at the end of this booklet).

## Installation

A licensed plumber should install your tank, fixtures, pipes and pumps to ensure that rainwater remains separate from the mains drinking water supply, and to make sure that any overflow from your tank is diverted to the stormwater drainage system. Contact the Plumbing Industry Commission for further information (contact details at the end of this booklet).

## Rebates

Customers connected to a mains water supply may be eligible for a rebate on the purchase and installation of a rainwater tank. Contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment (contact details at the end of this booklet) or your water authority for further information

# Can I use stormwater in the same way as rainwater?

Stormwater is rainwater that falls on your property but is not captured by your roof. Stormwater can be captured at a property's lowest drainage point and pumped back for use.

Stormwater should be used only:

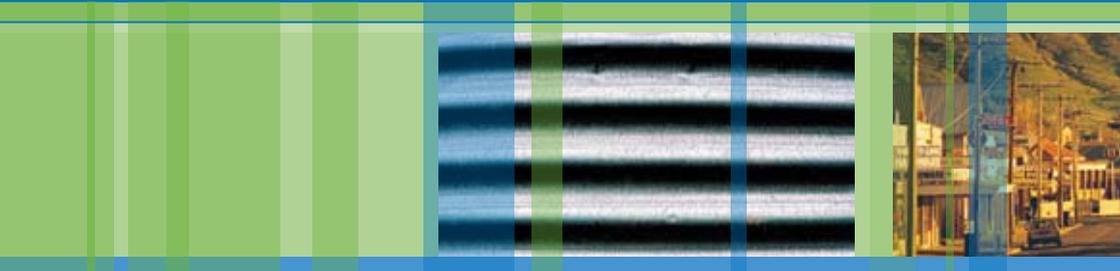
- Where it has been captured solely from your property.
- Where your property is clean (i.e. no loose soil or chemical/petrol spills).
- For low risk uses such as garden watering and toilet flushing.

Stormwater should **NOT** be used for drinking or food preparation.

Where possible you should not store stormwater in your rainwater tank. If you do store stormwater with rainwater, this water should only be used for low risk uses such as garden watering and toilet flushing.

You should make sure a licensed plumber installs any plumbing carrying stormwater, especially if using in your house for toilet flushing, to ensure stormwater cannot contaminate the drinking water supply. Contact the Plumbing Industry Commission for more information (contact details at the end of this booklet).





# Further information

For further information please go to:

[www.epa.vic.gov.au/water](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/water)

For specific information on:

- **Rainwater quality and your health**
  - Contact the Department of Human Services on 1300 761 874  
[www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au)
  - Download the *Guidance On Use of Rainwater Tanks* from [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- **Choosing a rainwater tank**
  - Contact a rainwater tank supplier (look under “Tanks & Tank Equipment” in the Yellow Pages) or your water authority
- **Maintaining a rainwater tank**
  - Contact a tank cleaner (look under “Tank Cleaning” in the Yellow Pages)
  - Download the *Guidance On Use of Rainwater Tanks* from [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)
- **Rainwater tank installation and 5 Star Standard**
  - Contact the Plumbing Industry Commission on 1800 015 129  
[www.pic.vic.gov.au](http://www.pic.vic.gov.au)
- **Rebates**
  - Contact your water authority or the Department of Sustainability and Environment on 136 186 or visit [www.ourwater.gov.au](http://www.ourwater.gov.au)