Frequently Asked Questions:

The Community Design Assistance Center has been asked some common questions since the 2008 inception of its Build-Your-Own Rain Barrel workshops in partnership with Montgomery County Virginia Cooperative Extension. Professionals, extension agents, professors, and product representatives have been contacted to ascertain appropriate answers.

1. **Question:** Many new shingles have additives to the content of the shingle itself to prohibit the growth of moss, mildew, and algae. Is this something that will leach into my water and be harmful if used to water vegetables?
   **Answer:** GAF, a mainstream company that sells shingles, stated that Copper Oxide is used in their shingles to suppress the growth of algae, moss, and mildew. Copper oxide is not harmful to plants. If harvesting rain water to use on vegetables or fruits, avoiding overhead watering is suggested. Using a soaker hose or being careful to water the soil around the base of the plant will help ensure the soil receives and locks up possible undesirables.

2. **Question:** Is water collected from asphalt shingles unsuitable to use in your vegetable garden?
   **Answer:** To date, no information has been located that would indicate that runoff from asphalt shingles is hazardous. The runoff may possibly contain some petroleum products in very low concentrations. Additionally, it is likely that any organic compounds in the roof runoff would attach themselves to the organic matter in the soil rather than being taken up by the plants.

3. **Question:** Do standard garden hoses have lead in them and if so, are they safe to use on fruit and vegetables?
   **Answer:** Based on information provided through a hose manufacturer [http://www.swanhose.com/qa.shtml](http://www.swanhose.com/qa.shtml) it appears that most garden hoses contain at least a trace amount of lead due to the use of recycled plastics and typical brass fittings. No studies on the potential for contamination of fruits and vegetables watered with a garden hose have been found to date. The amount of lead in a garden hose is small enough that it should not cause any problems. Also, plants do not readily take up lead.

   It is recommended that people water the soil of their gardens rather than the plants themselves, especially through the use of conservation practices like drip irrigation. Splashing water on plants directly with a hose (on a regular basis) often leads to disease problems in climates with high humidity. If trace amounts of lead get into the soil, there would be a lesser chance that it would be taken up by the root system, than if the water directly entered the plant by foliar means.

   There are “drinking water safe hoses” manufactured with medical grade plastic resin and nickel-plated brass fittings in which the nickel plating prevents the lead from contacting the water, should this be a strong concern for individuals.
4. **Question:** How could I go about testing the water in my barrel and what should I have it tested for?

   **Answer:** It is highly unlikely that there would be a problem with water collected from rain barrels for the uses outlined in our rain barrel workshop. Remember, rain barrel water is NOT recommended for potable water uses. Should someone desire to have their water tested for a specific concern, state certified lab could test water from a rain barrel (see [http://www.wellwater.bse.vt.edu/files/lablist2008.pdf](http://www.wellwater.bse.vt.edu/files/lablist2008.pdf) for a list of potential labs). There are a variety of tests that one could request ([http://mmilabs.com/water-quality.html](http://mmilabs.com/water-quality.html)). Testing for metals, salmonella, E. coli and Fecal coliform are four possibly relevant tests. Testing for metals is quite expensive and heavy metals should not be present in the water. The storm water test for metals is $220 per sample. Salmonella may be a possible contaminate if one’s roof had a large amount of fresh bird manure. If there is concern about E. coli or Fecal coliform in the water, a water sample could be sent to Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) in Wytheville. These tests only report the presence and absence of these substances. Again, unless an animal is defecating on the roof or in the rain barrel, these substances should not be present.

   As stated in previous questions, if water from a rain barrel is applied directly to the soil around the plants rather than sprayed on the leaves, these unlikely contaminants should not be an issue.

5. **Question:** What is the source of the barrels sold at the CDAC rain barrel workshop?

   **Answer:** The barrels are obtained from Mount Olive Pickle Company (North Carolina) through a partnership with Clean Virginia Waterways (CVW). According to CWV, the barrels held food grade products only (pickles, onions, peppers, olive oil, vinegar) – no chemicals.

6. **Question:** Are the barrels made from recycled plastics? Could they leech BPA?

   **Answer:** Clean Virginia Waterways stated, “to the best of our knowledge, the barrels are not made from recycled plastics. They are made from high density polyethylene (2, HDPE), which we understand is made WITHOUT Bisphenol A (BPA).

7. **Question:** Can I purchase a barrel directly from Mount Olive Pickle Company?

   **Answer:** No. Mount Olive Pickle Company, being in the pickle business rather than the barrel business, prefers to have one Virginia point of contact for the purchase of their used barrels for reuse. This point of contact is Clean Virginia Waterways in Farmville, VA.

8. **Question:** As an individual, can I purchase barrels directly from Clean Virginia Waterways or CDAC without participating in a workshop?

   **Answer:** Not currently. CDAC and Clean Virginia Waterways are dedicated to providing an educational workshop in conjunction with distributing rain barrels.
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