

# Water butt TOOLKIT

**CONSERVATIVE  
ENVIRONMENT  
NETWORK**

**July 2024**

## Water butt toolkit

This document outlines how CEN councillors can design and implement a water butt scheme for their residents. The increase in urbanisation has made communities more [vulnerable to flooding](#) and contributed to increased sewage spills. Water butts are a low-cost effective partial solution that will help keep rainwater out of our sewer network, reduce the use of storm overflows and boost our water security.

### Background

- **What are water butts?** A water butt is a storage container typically in the shape of a barrel that collects and stores rainwater. A standard water butt holds around 200 litres and costs between £35 and £60 on average.
- **How do water butts work?** Water butts are usually attached to the downpipe on a property so the rainwater that hits the roof goes into the gutters to the downpipes then into the water butt. Water collected from rainfall is stored in the waterbutt that can be released for use by a small tap at the bottom of it.
- **Are there different types of water butt?** There are two main types of water butts: traditional and slow-release. Traditional water butts store water until the water is manually released through turning on the tap. Slow-release waterbutts have a drain installed and once water reaches it is slowly released.
- **How can the water collected be used?** The water can be used to tend to gardens throughout the year and is especially useful in hotter months when water is more scarce and there could be a hose pipe ban in place.
- **What is the difference between natural water collected in water butts and mains water?** Mains water is water that is supplied by your local water company. The water is accessible through outlets such as taps and hose pipes, it has been chemically treated and is safe to drink. Natural water, collected in water butts, is not chemically treated or provided by a water company. It comes either directly from the ground springs, wells or from rainfall.

### Water quality and security in the UK

- **The UK's water quality is worsened by periods of heavy rainfall, increased urbanisation, and Victorian-era infrastructure.** Storm overflows were designed as a means for our sewer networks to cope during periods of heavy rainfall. Most of England's network is 'combined', meaning rainwater and raw sewage go into the same pipe. This makes rainfall the [primary driver](#) of sewage spills. As heavy rainfall becomes more common, so too does our need to use these outlets. The increase in urbanisation exacerbates the problem, by removing the land's natural ability to absorb rainwater.

- **Drought and increased water consumption threaten local water security.** Climate change is making water security an [increasing cause for concern](#), along with our ever increasing demand for water. Today individuals use [150 litres](#) of water a day on average (54,750 litres a year). Hose pipe bans are becoming a more regular occurrence in certain parts of the UK as a result.
- **Communities are at risk from more regular and extreme flooding.** In England [one in six people](#) are at risk of flooding. Water butts can reduce the risk of flooding by limiting the amount of water entering the sewer network and from pooling on paved areas.
- **If you would like to find out more about water quality and security, read the CEN councillor [water briefing](#).**

#### **How water butts help with local water quality and security**

- **Using natural water from water butts can reduce water bills.** The installation of metres that track mains water usage to produce customers' bills is becoming more common. Natural water, on the other hand, is free. For avid gardeners, the seemingly small change of using natural water, collected using a water butt, instead of mains water can lower water bills. Sprinklers and hose pipes can use up to [1,000 litres](#) of water an hour.
- **Water butts reduce pressure on the sewer network by keeping rainwater out of it.** If 3,000 standard water butts are installed, 600,000 litres of water will be diverted away from the sewer network. The reduction of rainwater entering the sewer network will result in fewer storm overflows being used on a reduced basis. This means a smaller quantity of sewage will enter our rivers and seas, and our water quality will see improvement.
- **Water butts protect water security by reducing mains water usage in gardens.** Water butts can provide access to water for gardening during a period of drought when there is limited mains water. This can reduce the consumption of mains water and therefore help to use water resources more sustainably and securely.
- **Water butts can reduce flooding by storing water.** By storing rainwater, water butts slow down and reduce the amount of water entering our sewer network. This is particularly important in urban areas which can experience flash flooding most acutely.

#### **Ideas for rolling out water butts in your local community**

- **Partner with your water company on a local roll out.** Water companies are incentivised to remove rainwater from the sewer networks as it can reduce the need to use storm overflows. Contact your water company to see if they would like to work with you to distribute free water butts to residents.

- **Take advantage of available grants to fund a water butt roll out in your community.** The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) and the [Water Restoration Fund](#) each provide funding for water-related community projects. If you would like to provide free water butts for residents, applying to available funding pots both publicly and privately funded will provide the financial means to do so. Examples of private funding can include your [LEP Network](#) or the [National Lottery Community Fund](#). A full list of government grants is available [here](#).
- **Get in touch with the developers operating in your area.** Some developers will put aside money as a community benefit fund for local residents to receive after a development is built. Meet with your local developers to see if they would like to work with you on a water butt roll out. Environmentally friendly schemes are often their priority for the funding. They may also be able to support coverage in local news outlets to help amplify the campaign.
- **Run a digital awareness campaign.** An awareness campaign advertising the benefits of water butts is a low-cost way of encouraging your residents to install them. This could showcase not only the benefits of water butts in general but also the local businesses that sell them. Simply adding an information page to your council website can serve as a resource for residents wanting to learn more. This could be joined by a digital campaign via your own social media channel or the council's to help spread the word.
- **Run a physical awareness campaign.** Some ways to socialise water butt installation in your local community could include: distributing leaflets; including water butts at upcoming general sustainability events; leading talks within local schools; housing a water butt display in your town hall; or hosting a stand in the local marketplace with a water butt demonstration.
- **Collaborate with local garden centres.** Reach out to your local garden centre to see if they would like to partner on a campaign. This could include securing a discount for residents wishing to purchase a water butt from them, or a giveaway competition for a limited number of them.
- **Lead by example by providing waterbutts for council buildings.** Houses are not the only buildings that can have water butts. Council owned and/or operated buildings, including the town hall, leisure centres, office buildings, and community centres, can all benefit from having water butts.
- **Strategically distribute water butts to community hubs.** If your budget is such that you are unable to roll out water butts at scale to residents, you could instead prioritise rolling out free water butts to community hubs, such as schools and churches. This will help to socialise and normalise water butts in the community, inspiring residents to buy their own.

## Case studies

- **Conservative-led Bromley Council provided residents with a discount to purchase water butts.** Bromley Council worked with [GetComposting](#) to enable residents to buy water butts at a lower price. A page was created on the council's website that provided residents with a link to purchase a water butt.
- **Isle of Wight Council is supporting its local water company with a community-wide water butt roll out.** Over 3,000 slow-release water butts have been given to residents for free. The water butt initiative was one of six [Pathfinder Projects](#) established by the Clean Rivers and Seas Task Force in collaboration with Isle of Wight Council and the Environment Agency. The scheme led to a [70% reduction](#) in storm overflow releases with no releases for a six month period despite heavy storms occurring.
- **Blackpool Council gave out 1,000 free water butts to residents.** Blackpool Council successfully secured £86,246 funding through the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund for its community flood resilience project. Every household that had the space for a water butt in Blackpool was eligible to receive a water butt and could apply via a simple form on the council's website. Combined, the water butts store approximately [150,000](#) litres of water.



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