

Spotlight on Green Communities

Whether they're using renewable energy, recycling electronic waste, or installing permeable paving, communities in northeastern Illinois are getting greener. On this page we're highlighting communities and park, conservation, and forest preserve districts willing to share their experiences with selected green practices.

Case Study: Village of Downers Grove Rain Barrel Program

The Village of Downers Grove anticipated distributing 200 rain barrels to interested residents in May 2010. Interest in the program exceeded all expectations and with the help of over 20 community volunteers, 540 rain barrels were distributed to homeowners throughout the Village.



According to Mary Scalzetti, Emergency Management Coordinator for Downers Grove, one of the Village's strategic planning goals is to become a steward of environmental sustainability. Their Sustainability Best Practices Report acts as a roadmap to pursue that goal, and one of the objectives is to promote the use of rain barrels throughout the Village. This was also one way the Village could participate in DuPage County Water Commission's "Preserving Every Drop" water conservation program.

About Rain Barrels

A rain barrel, which can be placed under gutter down spouts, is a system that collects and stores rainwater from roofs that would otherwise be lost to runoff and diverted to storm drains and streams. The barrels usually come in the form of a 55 gallon drum, a vinyl hose, a screen grate to keep out debris and insects, and a hose spigot that makes the captured rainwater accessible.

Rain barrels store the runoff from small to moderate storms. The captured water can then be used to irrigate lawns and landscaped areas and other outdoor uses between storms. They are also appropriate where vegetation is limited, provided that the captured water can overflow to open green space.

Some basic precautions should be taken in the use of rain barrels. The rain barrel cover should be securely attached; children should not be allowed to play on, in or near a rain barrel; rain barrel water should only be used for watering plants, lawns, and for outdoor cleaning- not for drinking; and rain barrels should always be placed on a flat, even surface. These precautions should be included with distribution of the rain barrels. For more information, see [Home Depot](#).

Benefits

While primarily used to conserve water, the use of rain barrels in conjunction with other stormwater best management practices can improve water quality and prevent negative impacts of runoff to streams. See CMAP's [Model Water Use Conservation Ordinance](#). A rain barrel will save the average homeowner about 1,300 gallons of water during the peak summer months, or 40% of total household water use (<http://www.epa.gov/greenhomes/ConserveWater.htm>). This not only reduces costs for the resident, but saves energy by decreasing demand for treatment of tap water. In addition, since rainwater contains no chlorine, lime, or calcium, it is ideal for lawns, gardens, flower pots, and car and window washing.

The Process

Downers Grove partnered with the Conservation Foundation (a not-for-profit land and watershed protection organization in Northeastern Illinois), the Pierce Downer Heritage Alliance (a not-for profit corporation in Downers Grove), the Downers Grove Park District, and the Downers Grove Library. The team developed goals and tasks for each partner.

Scalzetti recommends reaching out to all interested parties in planning and executing a program.

The Village created a brochure, order form, and web site. Local media was alerted through promotional materials. A rain barrel display was constructed and rotated throughout the community in areas of high visibility. The Village hosted an educational presentation by the Conservation Foundation on the benefits and use of rain barrels.

The Village developed a site plan for delivery and pickup. Staff processed the orders and payments for the rain barrels were made to the Conservation Foundation.

Results

All in all, 540 rain barrels were disbursed in the community. Scalzetti calculates that each time the fifty-five gallon barrels are filled, 29,700 gallons of water are diverted and reused at a time when the ground is dry and plants need water.

Scalzetti was impressed by the buy-in from the community, evidenced not only by the interest in using the barrels, but also by the numbers showing up to help with the program. Over twenty volunteers and several community organizations pitched in to make it a success.

Costs and Funding

Scalzetti says the Village used their general fund to run the rain barrel program. Expenses were kept to a minimum because of their partnership with the Conservation Foundation. The Village's role included marketing the program, creating and printing the brochures, recruiting and training volunteers, and administrative tasks. The Conservation Foundation managed the payment process, the informational presentations, and delivery of the rain barrels.

Advice to Other Communities

Scalzetti has several recommendations for other communities interested in a rain barrel program:

- Make sure to reach out to all interested parties in planning and executing the program. Local businesses and organizations expressed interest after it had begun.

- Allow plenty of time for the pick-up event.
- Require full payment by residents prior to picking up the rain barrel. Scalzetti said that people are more likely to pick them up on the correct day and time if paid for in advance.
- Distribute flyers to customers that depict how to self-install the rain barrels at home, as well as a list of businesses that can provide this service.

Next Steps

The Village is currently looking to repeat the program in 2011. They have begun meeting with potential partners and plan to involve the business community this time around. They are also discussing the addition of an art component (painted barrels) for the next event.

Resources

Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, March 2010. Model Water Use Conservation Ordinance. See [Model Water Use Conservation Ordinance](#).

City of Chicago, 2003. A Guide to Stormwater Best Management Practices. See [Chicago Stormwater BMPs](#).

The Conservation Foundation. See <http://www.theconservationfoundation.org/>.

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. Rain Barrels: Installation, Placement and Purchasing Guide. See [Rain Barrel brochure](#).

United States Environmental Protection Agency. August 2009. What is a Rain Barrel? See <http://www.epa.gov/region3/p2/what-is-rainbarrel.pdf>.

Contact

For more information on the Village of Downers Grove rain barrel program, contact Mary Scalzetti by phone at 630-434-5559, or Janene Cerulli by phone at 630-434-5577.

Are there other green practice case studies you'd like to see? Is your community interested in being in the spotlight? Please contact Lori Heringa by phone at 312-386-8621, or by email at lheringa@cmap.illinois.gov.