

How to Implement a Rain Barrel Distribution Program

This document will help you understand options in setting up a rain barrel program, how to evaluate criteria, the time line needed for planning, as well as the products and services available for your community program.

What is involved in promoting rain barrels?

Whether your municipality's mission is water quality or water quantity rain barrels are a perfect education and outreach tool for citizens. Rain barrels are an affordable, efficient, durable and economical tool that can save municipalities money by offsetting potable water use and provide many benefits for homeowners and gardeners. It is important to work with an experienced company to ensure a successful rain barrel program.



How do I establish a project budget?

There is no upfront cost to starting a rain barrel program. Many companies offer added services for free. Such services can include branding an informational website for your city, e-commerce for payment options, data gathering from sales and logistics for delivery and distribution. It is recommended to partner with other organizations or agencies that can help in planning and promotion of the event. By using media relations, utility bill inserts, free yahoo and google groups you can keep the advertising cost to a minimum.

Are there regulations on using rain barrels?

It is important to check your state's guidelines on rain water harvesting, but there are no federal regulations preventing the use of rain barrels.

What should I consider when selecting a rain barrel vender?

It is advised to choose a vendor that offers a high quality product, has the experience to promote, sell, and distribute rain barrels. This will ensure the event is a success based on the goals and objectives of the program.



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Do all rain barrels work the same?

Understanding the design, features and components of the rain barrel will help in the success and customer satisfaction of the sale event.

Suggested features:

- Removable locking lid with easy access for clean out
- Secured screened inlet to prevent debris and mosquitoes from entering the rain barrel
- Two overflow ports to manage excess water and to easily link two or more barrels together
- 1 1/4" diameter x 6' long over flow hose to allow excess rainwater to be diverted away from the home's foundation.
- 3/4" ball valve
- Lower spigot access at bottom of rain barrel



Why is overflow important?

The equation for collecting rainwater is 1" of rain on a 1000 sq. ft. roof surface will yield 625 gallons of rainwater. Most rain barrels will fill up with less than 1/10th of an inch of rain so it is extremely important to divert any excess rainwater away from the home's foundation. To fully execute diverting overflow from large rain events rain barrels should have a minimum 1 1/4" diameter overflow port and come with an overflow hose.

What considerations should be given to health and safety issues?

There are many rain barrels to choose from, it is beneficial to understand if the product works safely and efficiently. Your rain barrel should meet the following criteria:

- Locking lid with no gaps showing through to inside of rain barrel.
- Secured screen inlet to prevent debris from entering rain barrel and mosquitoes from breeding.
- Lower spigot to allow all the water to fully drain in a reasonable period.
- Includes overflow hose so excess rainwater is diverted away from the home's foundation, recommended size 1 1/4" diameter.
- Material should be opaque to prevent sunlight from reaching the rainwater and producing algae growth.
- A warning "Do Not Drink" should be legible on the front of the rain barrel in English and Spanish.
- Rain barrel should be stable when full.

How much time is needed to plan and implement a rain barrel program?

It is recommended to give 8 to 12 weeks to advertise and promote a rain barrel sale.

This will give the opportunity to partner with local organizations to help in distributing materials and will allow you to reach the widest audience.

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Should I consider adding services to the RFP?

As you prioritize the program's goals and set the budget it will be easier to determine which services your agency will want to include.

Some recommended considerations for services:

- Branded website to promote and educate citizens on program's mission
- Online e-commerce capabilities
- Email reminders to customers that have prepaid to pick up at sale event
- Plan and execute customer pick up for the rain barrel event
- Provide advertising and promotional materials
- Data gathering and sharing

How should we distribute rain barrels?

Depending on storage space and resources available you can choose to hold a one-day sale event, offer pre-sales for quarterly sales events or store and sell rain barrels year round.



What is the difference between a refurbished or food grade barrel and a new manufactured rain barrel?

A refurbished barrel has previously been used to hold another substance such as food or chemicals and must be cleaned and converted manually to safely collect and reuse rainwater. Newly manufactured rain barrels are designed with the intent to collect and reuse rain water safely and efficiently, some manufacturing processes produce a 50% recycled content with UV inhibitors within the high-density polyethylene plastic. Many new rain barrels are designed to nest for cost reduction in transport and storage. With the right design and features you can offer a high quality rain barrel very affordably that insures customer satisfaction. When you choose a newly manufactured rain barrel you can specify "Made in the USA".

Pros and Cons of making your own rain barrel:

Pros:

- Refurbished barrels are often free or purchased for nominal fee.
- Workshops are good for education and explanation of how to use rain barrels.
- Provides community involvement and education on water conservation.

Cons:

- Cleaning out barrels is time consuming.
- Limited appeal to most residents.
- Rain barrel may not fully protect against mosquitoes.
- Overflow may not accommodate heavy rains.
- Spigots can develop leaks due to poor quality sealant.
- Less customer satisfaction.
- Costly transport and shipping.

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Pros and Cons of distributing new rain barrels:

Pros:

- Rain barrel designed with features to make collecting and reusing rain water a positive experience.
- More attractive to appeal to more citizens.
- Meets health and safety standards.
- 3 year warranty.
- Comes ready to assemble.
- Comes with overflow hose to protect against flooding around homes foundation.
- Less time cleaning and building rain barrels more time for workshops that can be used for education on water issues.

Cons:

- Moderately more expensive.
- Less necessity for workshops.
- May compete with non-profit agencies.



Summary Check List:

- Set goals and mission of rain barrel promotion.
- Check for any state or local regulations on rain water harvesting.
- Research product available and request references and samples from companies.
- Understand features and safety and health issues to insure customer satisfaction.
- Contact other agencies to partner with for sale event and distribution, this will help set criteria for Request for Proposal.
- Consider subsidies to help fund an incentive to sell the rain barrels at a reduced price.
- Establish budget.
- Determine a timeline of events.
- Send out RFP and kick off a great rain barrel sale event!