Rain Barrel Program

November 3, 2016

If large numbers of San Antonio area gardeners take advantage of the SAWS Rain Barrel program will not solve our long term water challenges or reduce water rates but it will allow the gardeners to obtain a high quality rain barrel at a bargain price and more easily use rainwater to irrigate your container plants. If you are into competition, participation in the program may also allow SAWS to set a one day national water barrel distribution record, and it will result in favorite volunteer gardening programs to receive some cash to support their programming efforts. Sounds complex but fun doesn’t it!? Let me attempt to explain how it works.

Rainwater is a high quality water source for irrigation. The limiting factor in our climate is that our erratic rainfall events mean that we need a large storage capability in order to collect enough rainwater to meet the needs of our periods of dry weather. Storage tanks are expensive, often $1 per gallon of storage or even more. When you do the math it turns out that it is less expensive to use our municipal sources or wells for irrigation water than it is for you to build a large volume rainwater catchment system.

That being said, every gardener notices (or imagines?) the positive response that our flowers and vegetables show when moisture is provided by rain. Rainwater is more acidic and often includes nitrogen from the atmosphere, so the plant response is probably real. Having access to collected rainfall for our plants is a desirable goal for most gardeners. Having one or two rain barrels collecting runoff may meet the partial needs of a patio full of container plans.

Towards that end SAWS has created a partnership with a national rain barrel producer. SAWS is subsidizing all but $40 of the cost of a 50 gallon barrel complete with all the connections and mosquito cover. Each SAWS customer can purchase up to 2 of the barrels. The first step is to visit the SAWS website between now and December 9 to receive a coupon code number.

SAWS will quickly send you an authorization and coupon which you can then submit to the manufacturer’s website along with your payment by December 16. The manufacturer will send you a receipt that will allow you to pick up your barrels on January 14 at one of 3 sites- the San Antonio Botanical Center, the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, or Eisenhower Park.

In a similar program last year in San Diego, 1700 rain barrels were distributed in one day. Those of you that remember the low-flow toilet distribution events in the early 2000’s that slowed traffic on I-37 near the Alamodome , recognize that it may be possible to set a new record here in San Antonio!

Working towards setting a new national record and to help San Antonio gardeners to make effective use of the rain barrels, volunteers from several of our most active gardening and environmental groups are involved. The Bexar County Master Gardeners, the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas, the San Antonio Botanical Garden, the Green Spaces Alliance, and the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center will be spreading the word. When you complete your rain barrel application you will be asked to name one of the groups to receive recognition in form of a performance payment for the effort.

By now you are saying, “Yes, he was right, this is a complex program!” I hope you also think it is an interesting program! For more information on the SAWS Rain Barrel Program, and/or to sign up, visit the SAWS website at SAWS.org.