RAIN BARRELS – GATEWAYS TO STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

THE GATEWAY

Rain barrels are often called "gateway" stormwater practices because they are simple-to-install, easy-to-manage devices for capturing stormwater for reuse. Rain barrels help make people more aware of the personal and environmental benefits of managing stormwater on their properties. This often leads people to install additional practices like rain gardens. This story describes how a simple pair of rain barrels acted as the gateway to bringing a neighborhood together to conserve water and protect water quality.

Neighbors check out a rain barrel installed by SOAK Great Bay at this Dover home.

BERRY BROOK

The Berry Brook watershed in Dover has been the focus of a large restoration effort over the last several years. Pollution in the brook is related to stormwater runoff from the watershed's developed areas including rooftops, roads, parking lots and driveways. Multiple projects have been completed in the watershed to reduce the amount of pollutants reaching the brook*.

In 2015, Soak Up the Rain (SOAK) Great Bay piggybacked on the restoration activity in the watershed and focused on small scale stormwater management by bringing rain barrels to watershed residents through a Rain Barrel Social.

THE RAIN BARREL SOCIAL

It all began with a single willing homeowner and her love of gardening. Her interest in container gardens and foundation plantings quickly lead to an interest in capturing and reusing stormwater from her home's roof tops. SOAK Great Bay took it from there: first installing two rain barrels, then making additional stormwater recommendations for the property, and finally approaching the homeowner

Neighbors and the generous homeowner who hosted the event (center, right photo) visit the tent and display board at the Rain Barrel Social.

to see if she would be interested in hosting a Rain Barrel Social on her property. The answer was a resounding "Yes!"

The Social was hosted on a summer afternoon. Neighbors and visitors learned about water conservation, stormwater management, and how they can help to protect local water resources, including Berry Brook, the Cocheco River, and ultimately, Great Bay. Capturing stormwater runoff on their own properties reduces the amount of runoff and the amount of pollutants being picked up by that runoff that ends up in the brook (see box).

One lucky visitor won a free rain barrel while others were able to purchase them at a discounted price. Additionally, people signed up to have their properties assessed for potential stormwater practice locations and to have their rain barrels installed.

Happy "Rain Barrel Raffle" winners.

RAIN BARREL BENEFITS

Rain barrels allow property owners to save money by using stormwater from their roofs rather than paying for water for gardening and other outdoor water uses.

Using stormwater on our properties also more closely resembles nature: rain falls and the water is used to hydrate plants, then soak into the ground to be filtered and to replenish ground water supplies. This is true of many other stormwater practices too, such as rain gardens (bowl-shaped depressed gardens designed to capture runoff from roofs and yards) and infiltration trenches (stone-filled channels designed to capture rooftop dripline runoff or driveway runoff).

Finally, installing stormwater practices raises environmental awareness and, in the long run, may result in economic savings by avoiding major restoration efforts such as in the Berry Brook watershed.

Reasons to Soak Up the Rain at Home

As rain falls on our roof tops, driveways, and even compacted lawn areas, it runs off these hard surfaces, down the streets to catch basins and water bodies. This causes two problems:

Water Pollution. Runoff picks up and delivers pollutants like:

- Extra nutrients from fertilized lawns, which can cause too much plant growth within water bodies.
- Sediments, which can smother bottom-dwelling creatures in water bodies and can carry other pollutants attached to the particles.
- Bacteria from dog poop that is not picked up and properly thrown away.
- Oil and other fluids leaked from vehicles.

Local Flooding. Rain fall and snow melt that would have soaked in where it landed instead runs over land and enters piped systems, streams, lakes and other waterbodies that are not large enough for the volume, causing them to overflow and flood nearby land.

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