

Headline: L.A. still has a few free rain collection installations to dole out

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Any Los Angeles homeowner with a roof and an interest in rainwater harvesting may want to apply for a free rain barrel installation from the city. The rainwater harvesting pilot program, which kicked off in July, still has 170 openings for installations, each of which includes a free 55-gallon rain barrel and free setup.

Designed to conserve potable water and reduce the amount of polluted rainwater that runs untreated into the ocean, the \$1-million pilot plan has enough funds to outfit 600 homes with one rain barrel each. About 40 installations have been completed out of the 430 homeowners who have so far signed up.

Because the pilot plan is funded by the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000 through the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission, which identified the Ballona Creek watershed as a priority area for curbing rainwater runoff, homes in the Westside neighborhoods of Mar Vista, Sawtelle and Jefferson are given priority for the pilot. But all L.A. homeowners are eligible.

Implemented by the watershed division of the city's Bureau of Sanitation, the 600 rain barrel installations provided through the pilot program are estimated to save 584,100 gallons of water each year. The city estimates there are roughly 18 rain events in L.A. each year, which would fill each barrel as many times.

Though a single 55-gallon rain barrel will catch only about 10% of the 9,600 gallons of water generated in a typical year by an average 1,000-square-foot residential L.A. rooftop, those water savings are substantial. If each of the 800,000 residential parcels in L.A. were to install just a single rain barrel, the city estimates that about 800 million gallons of water would be saved, which would in turn reduce the demand for tap water -- a resource that's becoming more precious as L.A. enters a fourth year of drought.

L.A. hopes to have all the rain barrel installations completed this fall and an evaluation of the program finished next spring, so the program can be rolled out citywide in the fall of 2010.

Although rain barrels are available from a variety of manufacturers in a variety of sizes, the city chose a 55-gallon capacity because, when full, the rain barrels will weigh a relatively manageable 200 pounds. The rain barrels are also made from food-grade plastic. Repurposed from containers that once stored pickles, olives or syrup, the plastic won't leech, in case the harvested rainwater is used to grow food.

Each has already been retrofitted with wire mesh on top to screen debris, a spigot on the bottom to drain it, a connector at the bottom in case homeowners want to connect additional barrels and an overflow valve should the barrel fill up.

To apply for the remaining spots in the rainwater harvesting pilot program, visit larainwaterharvesting.org.