

Finding Creative and Meaningful Ways to Re-use Plastic Products

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Approximately 20 million plastic barrels are produced for use in the food industry each year. Unlike plastic bottles or wrappers, these barrels are not items that we use or even see everyday. These barrels are often produced and used by large companies, when they're no longer useful they become a waste product that have to be managed. When looking for solutions to problems such as the disposal of plastic barrels, by changing our everyday habits we are not able to reduce the production of these large plastic containers but instead we need to become innovative.

Here in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, the largest salmon producing river in the world flows through our backyard: the Fraser River. These salmon depend on small streams and watersheds for spawning and rearing habitat, however the ever-growing human population and associated land development is impacting on the habitat and salmon populations. The conversion of forests and fields to houses, roads and other hard surfaces increases the amount and

speed of water now flowing into these small streams. To reduce these impacts people in my community have been building rain gardens and installing rain barrels in their yards, schools and parking lots.

Those large plastic drums that were once used for shipping bulk cargo can be turned into decorated rain barrels. A rain barrel that gets connected to the roof gutter of a house allows the water that would normally end up in a storm sewer to be used to irrigate home gardens, lawns, shrubs and trees. This helps both conserve municipal water supplies and reduces the harmful effects of high storm flows on the receiving streams and fish habitat. My Dad and I found a blue barrel, stylishly painted it, and installed a spigot to use it as a rain barrel in our own backyard. We even found some plastic mesh washed up on the shore at a local Southern Gulf Island that we took and have used on the top of the barrel as a leaf guard from the downspout.

After doing some research I have found that widely popular beverage company Coca Cola is aware of this issue. By partnering with River Network, a non-profit organization supporting the protection of rivers throughout the U.S., they have



been able to expand the National Rain Barrel Program. Coca Cola provides grants and donates their empty beverage syrup drums to the program. With this, the River Network is able to support more than 40 rain barrel workshops in 24 states. Apart of the River Network's Reduce Your Water Footprint campaign, local organizations can then apply to the Rain Barrel program and receive free help and materials to host a rain barrel building workshop. It is so encouraging to see a large company like Coca Cola supporting this solution.

After seeing the cool things that were happening in the US I began my investigation into what kinds of action was being taken in my own community. As mentioned, Delta is doing a lot in terms of water conservation, a lot of action has been taken through building rain gardens and Delta has its own rain barrel program which I was very excited to discover. However, the barrels sold by the rain barrel program are not recycled but instead designed and produced as rain barrels. By re-using used plastic barrels from bulk materials that would otherwise get thrown out, we can tackle two large environmental problems instead of one. Why produce more plastic containers when we can recycle the ones that have already been made? As the design my Dad and I chose happened to be the Coca-Cola logo (only because we thought the barrel resembled a soda can) I'm planning on sending a photo of our barrel to Coca-Cola to see if they'd be willing to start a rain barrel workshop in our neighbourhood.

References

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