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Creating Sustainable Backyards Gets Easier For Chicagoans

New Program Website Features Online Rebate Forms, Interactive Maps

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As the spring gardening season kicks off, the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) announced the launch of an exciting new and convenient website for the Chicago Sustainable Backyards Program: www.sustainablebackyards.org.

The new site centralizes resources that will help Chicagoans create environmentally beneficial landscapes throughout the city.

The Chicago Sustainable Backyards Program, a CDOT initiative managed by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), offers Chicago residents information and rebates of up to 50% on purchases of sustainable backyard improvements, including:

- TREES (up to \$100 back)
- NATIVE PLANTS (up to \$60 back)
- COMPOST BINS (up to \$50 back)
- RAIN BARRELS (up to \$40 back)

“The Sustainable Backyards Program encourages Chicagoans to be part of the solution to issues surrounding water, waste, energy, and habitat loss,” CDOT Commissioner Gabe Klein. “This program is successful because it calls on residents to help make Chicago more sustainable, one backyard at a time. The new website will make it even easier to be part of the solution.”

The new sustainablebackyards.org website features several enhancements to the popular program:

- Chicago residents can now submit rebate applications online, using a smartphone or digital camera to quickly upload a photo of their receipts.
- An interactive map showcases information about where to purchase trees, native plants, compost bins, and rain barrels in the Chicagoland region.
- The program’s blog not only includes educational backyard advice, but also highlights stories of Chicagoans who made improvements in their backyards.
- An events calendar of Sustainable Backyards workshops and events makes it easy for residents to connect with the program and other program participants near where they live.

“The new website will make both the rebates and the educational component of this program more accessible to the public,” said Sustainable Backyards program coordinator Sarita Upadhyay. “Chicagoans can also use the new site to connect with each other and share innovative ideas for their properties.”

The program emphasizes the role of green infrastructure in alleviating basement and neighborhood flooding, and reducing the flow of polluted water into our rivers and Lake Michigan. Green infrastructure, as opposed to gray infrastructure (such as pipes), uses natural processes in order to infiltrate, evaporate, and/or reuse stormwater. Sustainable Backyards rebate-eligible items provide many benefits, from improving soils to cooling the air and fostering a sense of community.

Sustainable Backyards is part of CNT’s “Smart Water for Smart Regions” initiative, which includes research, inventive solutions, and regional advocacy focused on water supply and stormwater management in the Great Lakes region. Sustainable Backyards complements CNT’s wet weather retrofitting program, “Wetrofit,” which, in its pilot phase, will provide audits and resources for properties with basement flooding issues in Chicago’s Albany Park and Rogers Park neighborhoods.

Sustainable Backyards is funded by the City of Chicago and a USDA Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant.

City of Chicago residents can find more information at www.sustainablebackyards.org, or by contacting info@sustainablebackyards.org or 773.269.4086.

Founded in 1978, CNT is a Chicago-based think-and-do tank that works nationally to advance urban sustainability by researching, inventing and testing strategies that use resources more efficiently and equitably. Its programs focus on transportation, energy, water, community development, and climate. Visit www.cnt.org for more information.