

COMMUNITY BACKYARDS

Annual Program Report 2025



Partners

Thank you to our Community Backyards partners, funding agencies, and participating communities, who have supported our program throughout the years and helped coordinate our efforts to bring this program to the residents of Franklin County. Without these partnerships, it simply wouldn't be possible to reach over **3,400 participants** and provide more than **\$118,000** in financial assistance to residents in 2025.

Municipal Partners

Cities of Bexley, Columbus, Canal Winchester, Dublin, Gahanna, Grove City, Grandview Heights, Hilliard, New Albany, Obetz, Reynoldsburg, Upper Arlington, Westerville, Worthington, and Franklin County Townships via the Franklin County Board of Commissioners.

Workshop Facilitators

Our workshop facilitators are local watershed groups, gardening experts, and/or non-profits. With their help, we presented **23** workshops this year.



Immediate Discount Vendors

These partnering vendors processed nearly **1,500 rebates** and issued **\$88k** in reimbursements. Our residents spent **\$65k** at these businesses in addition to their **\$88k** rebates!



Program Summary

Community Backyards is a result of the joint effort from the City of Columbus, Franklin County, SWACO, and participating municipalities. With their support, the program actively engages and incentivizes residents in water conservation, stormwater education, and backyard conservation practices. This program supports partner initiatives involving water conservation while also meeting stormwater permit outreach and education requirements. Community Backyards teaches residents about stormwater pollution and backyard conservation and then lets them choose a conservation practice that works best for them, offering a range of rebate options as an incentive to change their behaviors. Each household is limited to one rebate per year, but they can participate every single year. This year, we kicked off in early April with the Upper Arlington workshop, and we ended with the Gahanna workshop in early September. Through these 21 weeks, we reached a record number of participants at 3,456!

Community Partnerships

Additionally, we grew existing and new community partnerships this year to help promote the program to new audiences and reach more underserved residents.

- **Franklin County Pollinator Pathway:** Franklin County Pollinator Pathway is now a 501(c)(3) and is self-governing! Pollinator Pathway is a national organization that promotes native plants and pollinators on a local scale. It is a community-based group and is not a membership driven organization. It was created to be an accessible, approachable framework to promote native plant and pollinator education and implementation. We look forward to our continuing collaboration to promote Community Backyards native plant rebates and our grant programs.
- **IMPACT Community Action:** Franklin Soil and Water, City of Columbus, and IMPACT Community Action worked together to reach diverse audiences that have historically been left out of the conservation conversation.
 - We worked with IMPACT's 4 Community Advocates to increase program visibility and stormwater education in underserved communities in the American Addition, Hilltop, Linden, and Southside neighborhoods.
- **Ohio State University Department of Entomology:** We worked with Ellen Danford, a Research Technician at the Ohio State University's Department of Entomology, to provide Community Backyards information on the distribution of participation in Community Backyards across Franklin County. They have been working with data from 2015 to 2024 participation to understand what makes someone more or less likely to participate in Community Backyards. We look forward to learning the results of their research and publications.

2025 Program Success

A detailed breakdown of program data can be found in **Appendix A**. Below is a brief summary.

Total Participation

3,456 residents participated and received a voucher (**+324 from 2024**).

- Online Course: **3,111 (351 increase from 2024)**
- In-person Workshops: **345**

Total Rebates

2,179 residents installed a backyard conservation practice and received a rebate through Community Backyards for a rain barrel, native plants, compost bin, or rain garden. This is a redemption rate of 63%, meaning 63% of participants implemented a new backyard conservation practice and received reimbursement for it.

Please see **Appendix A** for detailed data and **Appendix B** for maps.

Marketing and Outreach

To promote the program and education, we sent out messaging and promotional materials in a variety of ways.

- **Social Media:** Social media was heavily utilized to share posts on program information, rebates available, links to the online course and workshops, and directing traffic to the program website. Our Community Backyards social media post reach on Facebook and Instagram was over **33,000**.
- **Program Website:** The program website (CommunityBackyards.org) is our main repository for program information and participation. In 2024, the program website received **21,000 visitors (10% increase)**.
- **Early Bird Email Blast:** The online course opened on Friday, April 18 to celebrate Earth Day and to promote at Earth Day events that weekend. A marketing email blast was sent to **1,051 people (+281 from 2024)** who signed up for the Community Backyards email list.
- **Workshop Promotion:** Workshops were posted on the website and shared as Facebook events. Workshop facilitators and municipal partners were tagged on social media.

Additionally, municipal partners, local community groups, neighborhood organizations, etc. were invited to many workshops to help promote our program and events in their areas.

- **Recognizing Partners:** Municipal partners, watershed groups, and immediate vendors advertised the program to their audiences via websites, social media, emails, or newsletters.
- **FSWCD Newsletters:** Program promotion via Franklin Soil and Water's various newsletters and e-newsletters with Community Backyards program information received more than **13,000** views this year.

2025 Reflection & Plans for 2026

Here is what we learned this year and how we will improve the program for next year.

- **Dates:** In 2026, the online course will open on Friday, April 17 for Earth Day weekend and will remain open until October 1. We will likely kick off workshops again at the end of April, early May, to give opportunities for all to participate as early as possible.
- **Program Update:** To help stay on top of the amounts of vouchers and rebates that we are giving to residents, we are shortening the window for a participant to submit for reimbursement/use at an Immediate Discount Vendor from 45 days to 30 days. We expect this to increase the requests for extensions on vouchers but believe this will help in the overall tracking of funding and for clearer data on remaining funds for a community. This will also allow more participants to receive full vouchers.
- **Online Course Refresh:** With feedback from those that took the online course, we will be continuing to use the platform Articulate 360. Edits shall be made to the program this year to go more in depth with certain subjects and to make the program more transparent on who qualifies for the program and where the funding is coming from.
- **Reimbursement Choice:** We will be continuing our work with Choice Digital in 2026 to offer more options for residents to receive our traditional reimbursements. In addition to our immediate vendor discount rebates, residents who are submitting to FSWCD for reimbursement will receive an email from Choice Digital and will be able to choose whether they want a traditional mailed check, a digital merchant gift card, a physical merchant gift card, or a prepaid VISA card which are cash equivalent.

Appendix A
2025 Community Backyards Data

2025 Participation & Rebate Summary

Participating Community (Grant)	Online Participants	Workshop Participants	Total # of Participants	Rain Barrel Rebates	Free Rain Barrels	Native Plants, Trees & Shrubs	Compost Bins	Total # Grant Rebates Provided	SWACO Compost Bin Rebates	Grant Rebates + SWACO Rebates
Columbus	1768	201	1969	242	23	825		1090	168	1258
Bexley	41	9	50	4		18	1	23	1	24
Canal Winchester	4	12	16	3		8	0	11	1	12
Dublin	86	12	98	6		41	5	52	6	58
Gahanna	133	4	137	8		65	3	76	9	85
Grandview	30	1	31	2		8	0	10	2	12
Grove City	78	6	84	8		28	4	40	8	48
Hilliard	88	9	97	8		37	3	48	6	54
New Albany	35	1	36	1		19	1	21	0	21
Obetz	16	5	21	1		8	0	9	0	9
Reynoldsburg	90	12	102	4		54	2	60	7	67
Upper Arlington	83	10	93	9		44	3	56	4	60
Westerville	219	16	235	20		128	2	150	11	161
Worthington	90	14	104	9		61	3	73	4	77
Townships	334	32	366	38		142	4	184	28	212
Franklin County*	11	1	12	0				0	3	3
Plain Township - Streamside Landowners	5	0	5			4		4	0	4
SWACO									258	258
TOTAL	3111	345	3456	363	23	1490	31	1907	258	2165

*Franklin County resident who lives in a non-participating tax district (Whitehall, Grandview Heights, Brice, Marble Cliff, Riverlea, Minerva Park, Harrisburg, Lockbourne, Pickerington, Urbancrest, Valleyview).

**SWACO Compost Bin rebates are funded by SWACO at no additional cost to the municipality.

2025 Local Immediate Discount Vendor Rebates

1,753 residents (+259 from 2024) received an immediate discount rebate from one of our 6 vendors. Four vendors are located in Franklin County: City Folk's Farm Shop in Clintonville, Sunny Glen Garden in North Linden, Fisher's Gardens in Reynoldsburg, and Franklin Soil and Water/SWACO Compost Bin Sale through Franklin Soil and Water's office in Grandview. The two vendors located outside Franklin County are Scioto Gardens in Delaware and Leaves for Wildlife in Sunbury, but both vendors receive a lot of business from Franklin County residents due to their unique and large selection of native plants.

Immediate Vendor Rebates	Rain Barrel	Compost Bin	Native Plants	Total # Rebates	Rebate \$ Amt Provided	Total \$ Amt Spent on Purchases (before rebate)	Remaining \$ Spent on Purchases (after rebate)
City Folk's Farm Shop	308	5	130	443	\$27,241.95	\$53,490.20	\$26,248.25
Fisher's Gardens			342	342	\$17,089.30	\$21,493.12	\$4,403.82
Leaves For Wildlife			201	201	\$10,353.39	\$13,243.63	\$2,890.24
Scioto Gardens	18		466	484	\$24,490.48	\$38,391.37	\$13,900.89
Sunny Glen Garden			24	24	\$1,108.00	\$1,421.00	\$313.00
FSWCD Compost Bin		259		259	\$7,770.00	\$25,900.00	\$18,130.00
Totals	326	264	1163	1753	\$88,053.12	\$153,939.32	\$65,886.20

*If a cell is blank/blacked out, it is because that vendor does not sell that item. Therefore, they do not offer rebates for that item.

**This is a vendor that specializes in native plants, meaning most or all the perennials they sell are native species or cultivars of native species.

2025 Workshops

We presented 23 workshops around Franklin County. Here is a summary of the workshop dates and locations.

#	Workshop	Date	Location	Presenters	Invited Groups/Guests	# Attendees
1	Reynoldsburg (Invasive vs. Native Plants)	Sunday February 16, 1-2 pm	Beech Maple Lodge – Blacklick Woods Metro Park	FSWCD (Mikaela)		2
2	Upper Arlington	Saturday April 5, 1-2 pm	Upper Arlington Public Library: Tremont Branch (Sustainability Fair)	FSWCD (Kori)		32
3	Worthington	Thursday April 17, 6:30-8:00 pm	Griswold Center	FLOW		28
4	Columbus (Linden)	Thursday April 24. 6-7:30 pm	Linden Community Center	Sunny Glen Garden		11
5	Canal Winchester	Saturday April 26, 10-11:30 am	Canal Winchester Community Center	FACT		22
6	Columbus Lawn Care	Saturday April 26, 10 am- 12 pm	OSU Extension	FSWCD (Madison) & OSU		13
7	Columbus (Linden)	Thursday May 1, 7-8:30 pm	The Hardy Center	Sunny Glen Garden	Sponsored by Greater Columbus Growing Coalition, The Hardy Center, & Sunny Glen Garden	55
8	Columbus (Westside)	Sunday May 17 10-11:30 am	Outside @ Westgate Farmers Market	FSWCD (Kori)	Westgate Farmers Market hosting	15
9	Westerville	Saturday May 24 10-11:30 am	Westerville Community Center	FACT	Kurtz Bros, Westerville Garden Club	27

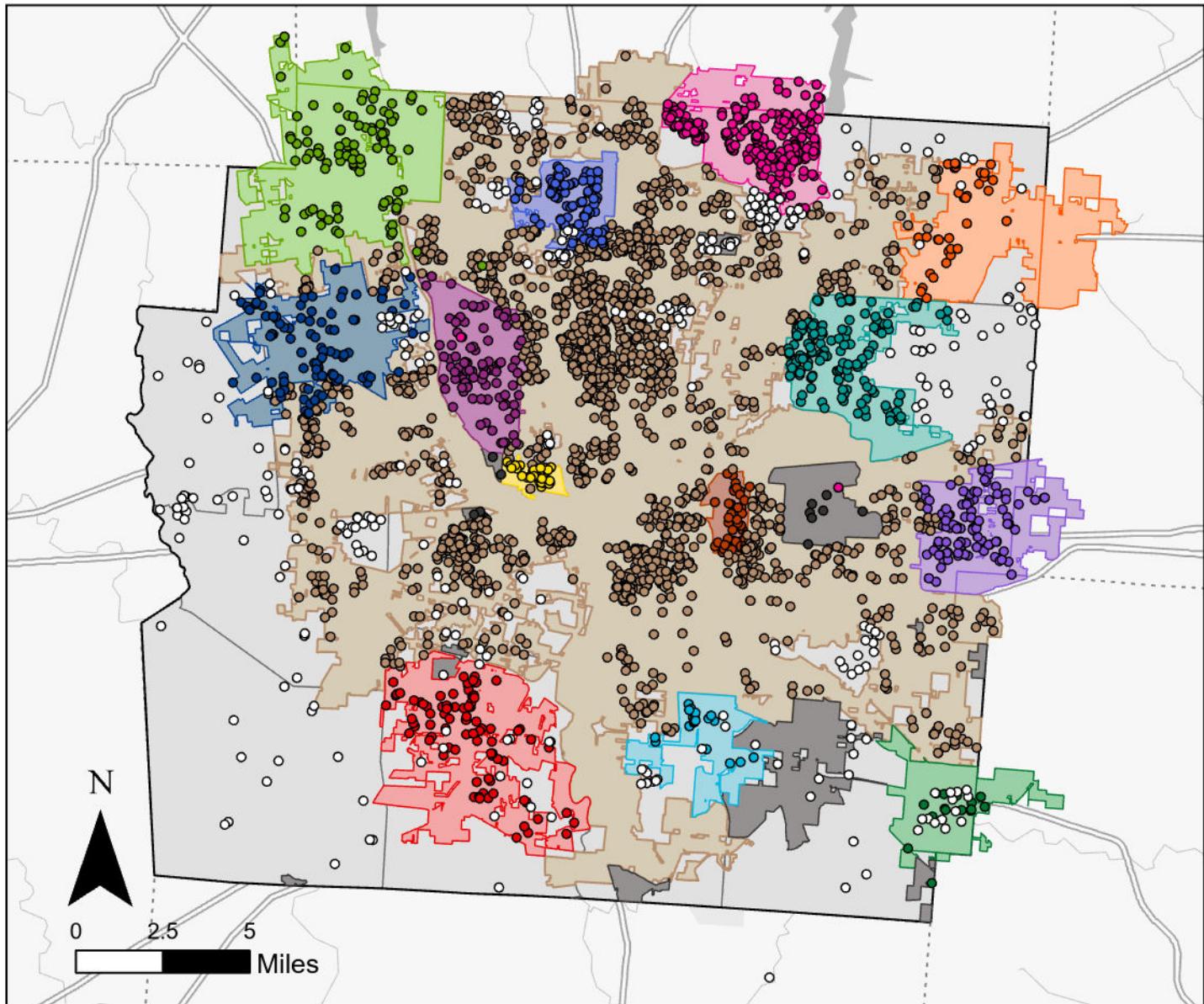
10	Columbus (Central)	Thursday May 34	Grange Insurance Audubon Center	Nicole Tabit, Franklin Park Conservatory		10
11	Columbus (Southside)	Tuesday May 29 6-7:30 pm	Southside Family Farms Reeb Center	Sunny Glen Garden	Sponsors: Southside Family Farms, Reeb Center & Sunny Glen Garden	7
12	Hilliard	Saturday May 31, 10-11:30am	Hilliard Community Center	FLOW	Hilliard ESC & Keep Hilliard Beautiful via Melissa Muth	20
13	Reynoldsburg	Tuesday June 3, 6-7:30 pm	Reynoldsburg City Council Chambers	Columbus Garden School		7
14	Columbus (North Linden)	Wednesday June 4, 6-7:30pm	Maize Manor United Methodist Church	Columbus Garden School	Urban Farm Church	15
15	Obetz	Saturday, June 22, 10-11:30am	Obetz Community Center	Columbus Garden School		6
16	Bexley	Sunday June 15, 1-2:30pm	Bexley City Hall	FACT		19
17	Dublin	Tuesday June 17, 6:30-8pm	Dublin Recreation Community Center	Columbus Garden School		11
18	Grove City	Tuesday June 17, 6:30-8 pm	Eagle Pavilion @ Fryer Park	FLOW/SWACO		9
19	Columbus (East)	Tuesday June 24, 6-7:30pm	Franklin Park Conservatory	Sunny Glen Garden	Sponsors: Franklin Park Conservatory & Sunny Glen Garden	17
20	Columbus (Salem Garden)	Sunday June 29, 3-4pm	Salem Elementary School	FSWCD (Mikaela)	Salem Garden Collaborative	17

21	Columbus (East/Bronzeville)	Thursday July 3, 4-5:30pm	OSU African American and African Studies Community Extension	Sunny Glen Garden	Sponsors: Bronzeville Growers Market & Sunny Glen Garden	5
22	Composting Tips & Tricks (Virtual)	Tuesday August 12, 7-8pm	Virtual via Zoom	Sunny Glen Garden		11
23	Gahanna	Saturday September 6, 11am-12:30pm	Ohio Herb Center	FACT	Host: Ohio Herb Center	9

**Appendix B
2025 Community Backyards Maps**

Community Backyards

2025 Participation



Total Participants: 3,456

324 increase from 2024

Online Course: 3,111

Workshop: 345

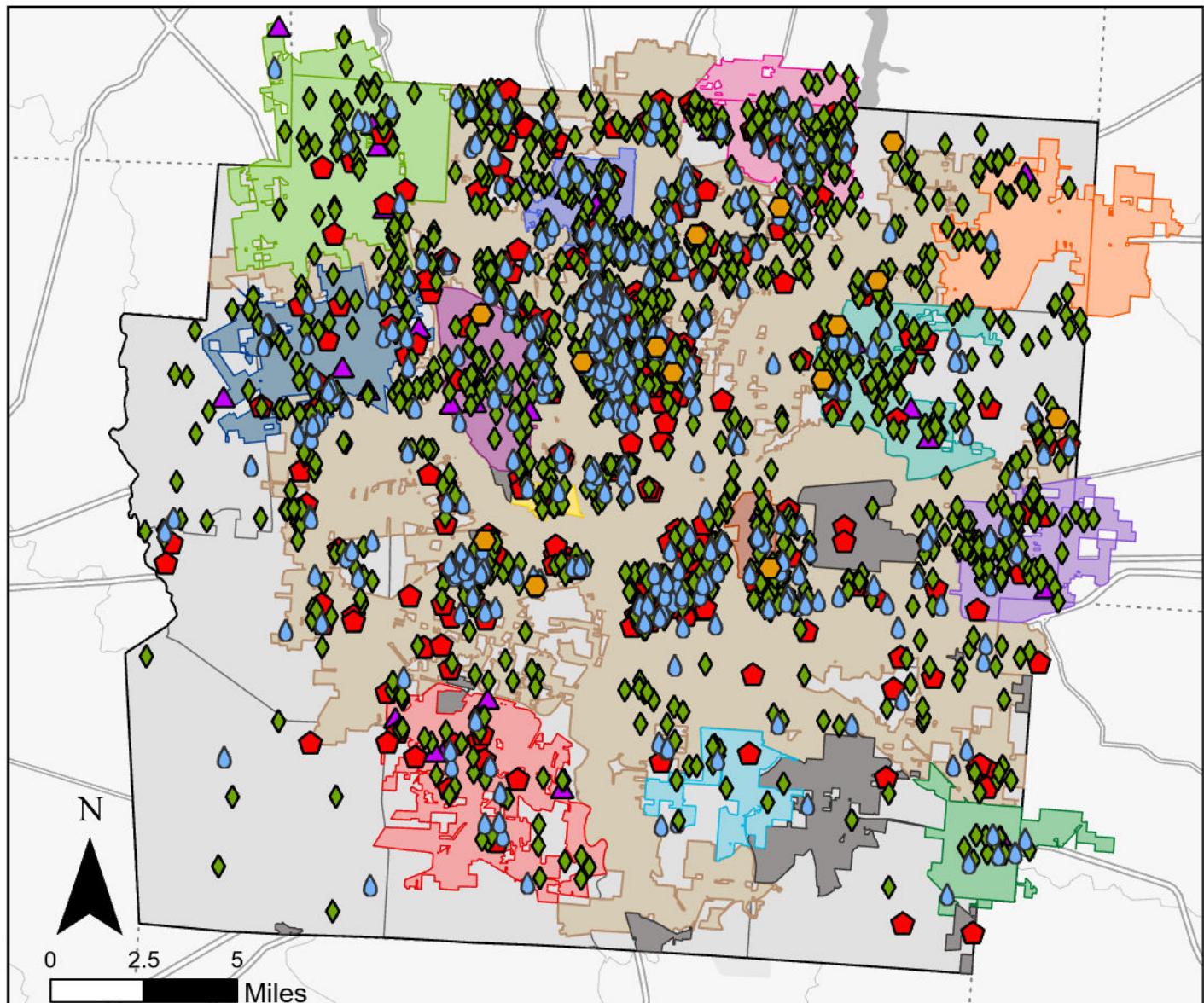
Thank you for another successful year!

- Columbus
- Bexley
- Canal Winchester
- Dublin
- Gahanna
- Grandview Heights
- Grove City
- Hilliard
- New Albany
- Obetz
- Reynoldsburg
- Upper Arlington
- Westerville
- Worthington
- Townships
- Franklin County
(Non-Participating Tax Districts)



Community Backyards

2025 Rebates



Total Rebates: 2,179

186 increase from 2024

Rain Barrels: 386

Native Plants: 1,490

Compost Bins: 31

SWACO Compost Bins: 258

Rain Gardens: 14

Columbus

Bexley

Canal Winchester

Dublin

Gahanna

Grandview Heights

Grove City

Hilliard

New Albany

Obetz

Reynoldsburg

Upper Arlington

Westerville

Worthington

Townships

Franklin County
(Non-Participating Tax Districts)

Rain Barrel*

Native Plants

Compost Bin

SWACO Compost Bin

Rain Garden

*Points include free
rain barrel rebates.

Thank you for another successful year!

