

# **RPM Fundraising Conservation Tree Sales**

## **Program Information**

Fundraising with RPM Native Conservation Trees and Shrubs is an opportunity for your communities to plant high quality trees in their yards, parks and public spaces, wild areas, and conservation projects while adding dollars to your organization, agency, school, or program budget.

A RPM Conservation Tree Sale can help:

- Raise money for your programs
- Increase the visibility of your organization
- Bring in new members and supporters
- Attract supporters from outside your usual audience
- Involve volunteers in a short-term project with tangible results
- Support the community and the environment with conservation tree plantings.

### **What is RPM?**

The Root Production Method or RPM is a series of horticultural practices that nurture young seedlings to obtain higher survivability, faster growth and shorter time to maturity. The horticultural practices include: collection of superior native seed stock, air root pruning, greenhouse growing, acclimation to local conditions, balanced nutrition, soil health, container growing, and timing learned from over 20 years of field research. This natural patented process includes no genetic modification and provides individual trees an early jump-start for future success in conservation plantings.

### **Trees for Conservation**

RPM native trees are “conservation trees” because they are well suited for a wide variety of planting sites -urban and suburban backyard habitats, restoration plantings along creeks and rivers, in parks and community spaces. The seedlings are delivered to you in RPM Stage 3 containers (10 1/8" diameter x 7 1/2" depth; approx. 3 gals.). Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic seedlings are 2'-5' in height; Southern and Gulf Coast species are 3'-6'.

### **How It Works**

Any school, non-profit organization, or agency can register with RPM Ecosystems to do a Conservation Tree Sale. Your organization reviews the “List of Available Species” in your region for the planting season of your Sale. You can choose to offer all or only some of the species. You can download the full-page descriptions from the RPM web site under “Plants for Conservation Tree Sales”. Note the relevant factors such as climate zone, planting purposes, whether the trees will be planted in a high-stress urban area, and who will be doing the planting. RPM staff can assist you in choosing the species best suited to your region and objectives.

RPM provides a kit of Sale tools: a “Checklist for Successful Tree Sales” with the tasks for your Fundraising Sale Coordinator, Sample PR Materials and Forms, descriptions of Available Species. Download these tools from [www.rpmecosystems.com](http://www.rpmecosystems.com) “Fundraising Sales” page, or a kit of printed materials can be mailed to you.

Your organization promotes the sale to your members, through its networks and to the public. You collect orders and payments and communicate at regular intervals with RPM about the progress of the Sale.

At least two weeks before the Pick-up Day, you compile the orders and submit your total order with 50% of the total payment due to RPM Ecosystems. The balance is due within 30 days of receipt of the final invoice.

### **The Numbers – How much revenue can your organization expect?**

You should create a Fundraising Sale Budget with estimates of all the costs of the Sale: seedlings, shipping, print ads, radio spots, copies of fliers or posters. Your organization purchases the seedlings at a wholesale price, which varies by species and region. You sell them at or above the suggested retail price.

After you choose the species for your Sale and how many you expect to sell (this number is a sales goal, not a contract), RPM confirms availability and prepares an estimate with the total cost of the seedlings plus shipping.

Download the “Successful Fundraising Example” of the Buffalo NY Audubon Tree Sale, which sold over 1,500 trees and netted close to \$44,000. See more ways you can maximize net revenue with “Other Tips for A Successful Sale” below.

### **Shipping**

Shipping charges are \$1.50 per mile roundtrip from an RPM nurseries in Dryden, NY or Vancleave, MS. For example, an order of trees shipped 100 miles will cost  $(100 \times 2) \times \$1.50 = \$300$ . This is one delivery charge, whether you order 100 or 1000 trees. Therefore, the larger your total order to RPM, the more profit you will make per tree.

The minimum order for Fundraising Sales is 100 trees. Exceptions can be arranged by prior agreement with RPM, and if your organization picks up the tree seedlings at the RPM Ecosystems nursery in Dryden, NY or Vancleave, MS.

For small orders, it may be more cost-effective for your organization to pick up the seedlings at the Dryden NY or Vancleave, MS nursery. Volunteers who come to pick up the trees will get to see the nursery and learn more about the Root Production Method that produces such healthy, fast-growing trees.

### **The Timeline**

A successful fundraiser needs 9-10 weeks for promotion, order taking, and delivery from RPM Ecosystems. The program is pre-order; people select tree and shrub species, fill out your Order Form and send it with their payment to your organization. You can take orders by snail mail, with credit card payment by fax, phone, or via your web site with secure on-line ordering.

Your order deadline needs to be at least 17 days prior to the tree pick-up date. That gives you a few days to compile the orders and payments, check all the numbers. Submit the final total order with 50% of the payment to RPM at least 14 days before the pick-up date.

Keep a tally of the incoming orders by species and communicate this to RPM at weekly intervals. This will help our nursery set aside the tree seedlings for your customers and expedite the shipping process.

## **The Important Role of Sale Coordinator**

Recruit a volunteer or assign a staff person the role of Sale Coordinator as early as possible. This person needs to be an organized self-starter who is enthusiastic about the Sale, can work with a timeline, is able to recruit volunteers, keeps track or has an assistant keeping track of incoming orders and payments; can organize and delegate tasks on the big pick-up day. The “Checklist for Successful Tree Sales” provides the Coordinator with an outline of the Sale tasks.

## **Your Sales Force**

Every one of your members, staff, and their families can talk up the Sale, hand out fliers with order forms, and remind people to place their orders before the deadline. If you are a school, send a Tree Sale flyer home with every child. Download “Marketing Tips” and use as many of them as often as possible to get the word out.

## **Volunteers**

Volunteers appreciate discrete and specific tasks that show results in a short time frame. And there are many opportunities for volunteers to get the satisfaction of helping your organization raise a significant amount of money in a short period of time. Reliable volunteers are crucial for all aspects of the Sale, from getting the word out, to unloading the delivery truck (1-3 days before the pick-up), to helping when everyone shows up on the big Pick-up Day. Start recruiting volunteers right from the day your organization decides to do a Fundraising Sale. A partnership with a local scout troop, 4-H club, or FFA chapter has proven success in providing enthusiastic young volunteers for tree sales.

## **Other Tips for A Successful Sale**

Here are some ideas from other organizations that have had successful Fundraising Sales:

- One person as the Sales Coordinator is absolutely necessary to make sure all the bases are covered and that orders and pick-up logistics are meticulously taken care of. The Coordinator can be a staff person or a volunteer with good organizing skills who is able to donate significant time over the duration of the Sale.
- **Line up your Sale and planting trees with a seasonal theme or celebration.** For example, timing the delivery date for the weekend before, on, or after Earth Day; a southern Sale can be billed as a celebration of the Spring or Fall Equinox; a northern Sale celebrates Arbor Day. Planting a tree on Mother’s Day or Father’s Day is a very special gift to a parent, or a meaningful lasting memorial to those who’ve passed on. Coordinating the tree sale with a harvest festival or other Fall event may be beneficial.
- **Corporate Sponsorship** Ask a local business for a donation to cover the costs of the trees and advertising. Pitch to them that they will bolster their profile as a green, environmentally-friendly business, and benefit from the visibility of your Sale promotion and on pick-up day.
- **Work with local partners** who can help promote and sell the seedlings, such as local college or school groups who support your programs, city and town government entities, and preservation groups.
- **Additional Revenue** Consider offering products that your customers may want to purchase for the planting and care of their seedlings, such as bagged mulch, tree guards, stakes. You can approach a local nursery or hardware store to negotiate a volume discount and then re-sell them, or work out a consignment agreement to sell at the pick-up location and split the profits with the local business.