RAIN GARDENS

A household way to improve water quality in your community

Rain gardens are just what they sound like – gardens that soak up rain water, mainly from your roof, but also from your driveway and lawn. They are landscaped areas planted to wild flowers and other native vegetation to replace areas of lawn. The gardens fill with a few inches of water and allow the water to slowly filter into the ground rather than running off to storm drains. Compared to a patch of conventional lawn, a rain garden allows about 30 percent more water to soak into the ground.

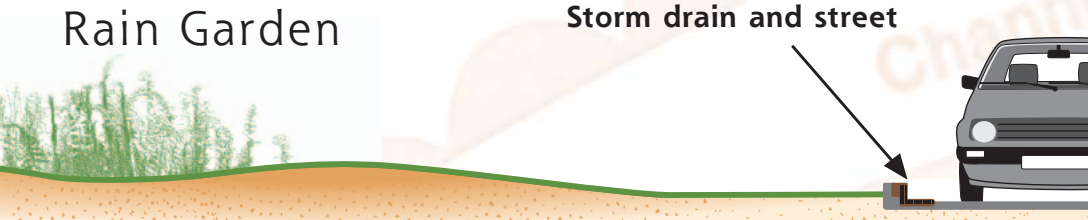
Holding back the runoff helps prevent pollutants such as fertilizers from washing off your yard, into storm sewers, and eventually into nearby streams and lakes. By reducing the amount of water that enters the local storm drain systems, rain gardens can also reduce the chances for local flooding, as well as bank and shoreline damage where storm drains empty into streams and lakes.

People in many parts of the country are starting to build rain gardens in their yards and promoting their use in other locations, such as neighborhood parks. You can help in your own yard by simply building one or more rain gardens to collect runoff from your roof. Rain water can sometimes be collected from your driveway or lawn by locating a rain garden in a low spot where the water naturally drains.

Tips for a productive rain garden

- Keep in mind that a rain garden is a "garden" not a prairie. The focus is on flowers, although some grasses can be used.
- When planting the rain garden, ask some friends to help. A few people helping for an hour can be fun for all and will allow you to get the planting done in a couple hours.
- In the weeks after planting, you may want to hoe dandelions and other weeds until the mature garden plants crowd them out.
- As the rain garden matures, you will need to thin the population of some plants to allow others to grow.
- Leave the dead or dormant plants standing over the winter. Many of the plants will provide seeds and shelter for birds. In spring cut back or mow the stalks to allow new shoots to emerge.
- Installation of a rain garden is slightly more work than a comparable area of lawn, but maintenance is low once plants mature.

Rain Garden



Consider a rain garden for your yard

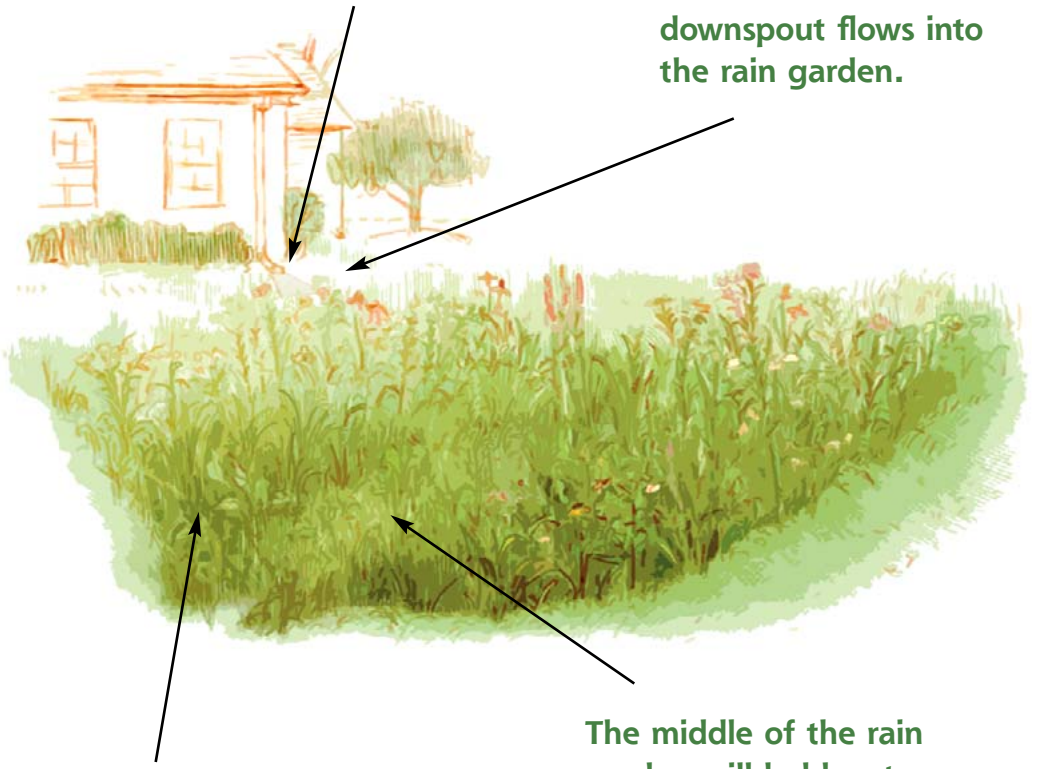
Rain gardens can be your personal contribution to cleaner water, healthier fish and wildlife populations, and a greatly improved environment for your family and community. Each rain garden may seem small, but collectively they produce substantial neighborhood and regional environmental benefits. Rain gardens work for us in several ways:

- Increasing the amount of water filtering into the ground, which recharges groundwater and helps reduce the amount of pollutants washing off to lakes and streams;
- Helping sustain adequate flows in streams during dry spells;
- Providing valuable wildlife habitat;
- Enhancing the beauty of your yard and the neighborhood;
- Helping protect communities from flooding and drainage problems;
- Helping protect streams and lakes from damaging flows and reducing erosion of the of streambanks and lakeshores;
- Reducing the need for costly municipal storm water treatment structures.

Rain gardens are useful even where little space is available.

The rain garden is located to receive roof water exiting the downspout.

A shallow swale helps ensure that water from the downspout flows into the rain garden.



The rain garden is completely planted with native species. Because it's a "garden," more flowers are used than native grasses.

The middle of the rain garden will hold water during a heavy rain, so the runoff can gradually soak into the ground.

Building a rain garden

Key steps in the process include sizing, choosing the appropriate plants, construction, planting, and maintenance. You might decide to do all or some of the steps yourself or you might a select a professional landscaping company to help you. However you decide build your rain garden, try to keep the design simple. This will help make the garden as affordable as possible and increase the chances for you to be involved in all the steps of making one. The photographs from several different rain garden projects show a few of the steps in the process.

1

Rope is used to lay out the boundary of a future rain garden.

2

The rain garden is dug to 3 to 4 inches in depth with care to make the bottom as level as possible. With the lawn sloping gently upward to the house, the garden is positioned to trap water from a downspout.

3

Neighbors planting native plants in zones identified by string laid out on the ground. Planting only takes about 2 hours with a little help.

4

The young native plants begin to flourish. Rain water from the down-spout will flow directly to the rain garden.

5

This rain garden is two year old. Weeds have a hard time growing in a mature rain garden. Old stalks can be cut back or mowed in the spring to give the new growth a good start. Birds and butterflies are regular visitors to the garden.

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