

WHAT IS A RAIN GARDEN?



A **rain garden** is a planted depression that allows rainwater runoff from impervious urban areas like roofs, driveways, walkways, parking lots, and compacted lawn areas the opportunity to be absorbed. It reduces rain runoff by allowing stormwater to soak into the ground (as opposed to flowing into storm drains and surface waters which causes erosion, water pollution, flooding, and diminished groundwater).

A rain garden can be designed for your specific soils and climates. The purpose of a rain garden is to improve water quality in nearby bodies of water. Rain gardens can cut down on the amount of pollution reaching creeks and streams by up to 30%. Your rain garden can be placed anywhere water runs off from a downspout, near a driveway, or in a natural drainage channel and the native plants in it will act sort of like a sponge, soaking up excess water flow.

Rain gardens can capture runoff from your yard before the excess water enters a lake, pond, or river, or before it enters the local sewer system. One of the biggest causes of water pollution in the United States is storm water runoff, because it typically carries all the surface pollutants with it.

Rain gardens are typically made up of native plants and grasses that are planted in a shallow depression. **Native plants** are recommended for rain gardens because they generally do not require fertilizer and are more tolerant of one's local climate, soil, and water conditions and attract local wildlife such as native birds. The plants (a selection of wetland edge vegetation, such as wildflowers, sedges, rushes, ferns, shrubs and small trees) take up excess water flowing into the rain garden. If you have an area in your yard where runoff and erosion is a concern, a rain garden may alleviate the problem by giving water a place where it can collect and slowly seep into the ground.

A rain garden is not only a way for homeowners to solve erosion and drainage problems, but it's also better for the earth. The trickle-down effect that a rain

garden produces mimics what happens in nature, with water slowly flowing into the water table, rather than rushing into the municipal waterways. Returning fresh water to the earth is a better solution, because the water goes where it belongs, rather than into the sewer system, to help recharge the groundwater supply.

For more information on rain gardens please check out these websites:

EPA website:

http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/index.cfm?action=factsheet_results&view=specific&bmp=72

WI DNR website: <http://dnr.wi.gov/runoff/rg/>

A how-to brochure:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/dsfm/shore/documents/rgmanual.pdf>

NOTE: This is a very good resource to research the many different types of plants available to use in your project along with care information so check out this Website access to a book on plants used in Rain Gardens:

<http://www.pca.state.mn.us/index.php/water/water-types-and-programs/stormwater/stormwater-management/plants-for-stormwater-design.html?menuid=&redirect=1>