

PLANTING YOUR RAIN GARDEN KIT

What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is simply a garden that captures rainwater, allowing it to soak naturally into the soil. By infiltrating rain into the ground, you can reduce problems with runoff and standing water. In addition, the plants and soil in a rain garden filter and reduce pollutants that may be in the runoff, like nutrients and pesticides from lawn applications, and oils and metal from cars and roads.

The plants included in your Rain Garden Kit have been selected to tolerate both wet and dry conditions, while also providing habitat for butterflies and other wildlife. And, provide a variety of color for your enjoyment.

Site Considerations

Several factors will influence where and how to create your rain garden. When choosing a good location, consider the direction where rain flows. Your property has an existing drainage pattern (even though it may not be very noticeable), and it will usually be easiest to take advantage of that.

Note the direction of runoff and low spots where water collects. If you are not sure where these are, and it's not raining, find them by running hose water on the ground. If these spots are away and downhill from your building foundations, they will be good places for your rain garden.

Rain gardens for single-family homes will typically range from 150 to 400 square feet (10' X 15' to 20' X 20'). But remember; any size rain garden, even a small one, will work. It will also be a lovely addition to your landscape.

Evaluate your soil conditions because tight clay soils can make it difficult for rain to infiltrate into the ground. To improve infiltration, you can add sand, gravel, and possibly a drainage pipe system, depending upon your site conditions. See below under "Prepare the Site" for a suggested rain garden soil mixture.

Hints for choosing a spot:

- **Stay at least 10 feet away and down slope from building foundations to avoid to a leaky basement.**
- **Stay away from septic system drain fields.**
- **Be aware of rights-of-way and underground service lines or utilities.** Avoid excavating or planting in these areas. You don't want to accidentally dig up your phone or other utility lines, and there may be restrictions to activities in rights-of-way. Before you dig, call "MISS DIG" (1-800-482-7171), and have the area flagged.

Prepare the Site

Soils on developed land have been compacted by heavy construction equipment. The soils will need to be dug up and loosened to a depth of two feet, or replaced with rain garden soil mix (50-60% sand, 20-30% topsoil, 20-30% compost), not only to prepare for planting the garden but so rain can soak in. If you have extra soil left over after this loosening process, use it in another part of your yard.

Plant the Garden

Although native plants species are low maintenance, that doesn't mean NO maintenance. Designing the garden for easy maintenance is part of your planning process. In arranging plants in your rain garden, consider how tall plants may affect the view of and around the rain garden. Tall plants could inconveniently block the view of street traffic from your driveway.

Mulching

Plan to mulch your rain garden, which will keep it moist, protect your plants, discourage weeds, and make weeds easy to remove. How much mulch? A cubic yard of mulch will cover approximately 100 square feet 3" deep. A 10' X 20' (200 square feet) rain garden will require 2 cubic yards of mulch.

Check the Flow

If there is a specific spot where rain is flowing into your garden, you may need to break up the flow with a few strategically placed rocks. Otherwise the force of the rain entering the garden could cause erosion. This too, can be part of your attractive design.

Maintaining Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are low maintenance, but not NO maintenance. You worked hard to create your rain garden, and to keep it working well for you and looking its best, some regular care is required. Healthy, dense and diverse plant growth ensures the success of your rain garden. As the plants mature over 1-2 years, your garden will become more effective.

- **If it doesn't rain, water your plants until they are established.** Once the deep root system has grown into the soil, they will probably survive a drought. But until then, just like any newly planted perennials, they need water to get started.
- **Weed regularly:** A nicely prepared rain garden is a great place for invasive plants to start growing. This is where mulch comes in handy; it will be simple to just pull those little seedlings out before they get established.
- **Don't park or drive on your rain garden.** Just like a septic field, it needs to be protected from getting squashed. Otherwise, it will not be able to absorb your rain!
- **Don't let sediment, soil, sand, or debris flow into your rain garden.** It can bury the plants, destroy the absorbancy, and ruin all your efforts.
- **Keep an eye on the plants.** If a plant isn't thriving where you placed it, don't be shy about moving it to another location in the rain garden. A rain garden has different zones of wet, wet to dry, and drier areas, and sometimes it isn't easy to tell exactly where a particular plant will grow best until it has rained a few times. A rain garden is a living system; go with the flow.

Additional Website Resources on Rain Gardens

The information provided in this sheet is a guide and only scratches the surface of rain gardens. Listed below are several good resources on the Web that can provide more detailed information on Rain Gardens.

Rain Gardens of West Michigan: www.raingardens.org/index.php

Rain Gardens: A How-to Manual for Homeowners: <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden/rqmanual.pdf>

Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association: www.thewatershed.org/(type in "rain gardens" in search at bottom of page)

Wisconsin Rain Gardens: www.wnrmag.com/supps/2003/feb03/run.htm

Maplewood Minnesota Rainwater Gardens site: www.ci.maplewood.mn.us/index.asp

Montgomery County, Maryland: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc/services/dep/rainscapes/home.html

Natural Resources Conservation Service: www.nrcs.gov/programs/