

Rain Gardens

(Adapted from the WI DNR publication: Rain Gardens: A Guide for Homeowners and Landscapers)

What is a rain garden?

A rain garden is a depressed area in the landscape that collects rain water from a roof, driveway or street and allows water to slowly filter into the ground in an area planted with native deep-rooted perennials and grasses. Rain gardens can be a cost effective and beautiful way to reduce runoff from your property.

Why is a rain garden important?

- Improves groundwater – rain gardens increase the amount of rain water that filters into the ground to help recharge our aquifers.
- Removes pollution – helps protect streams and lakes from pollutants such as lawn/garden fertilizers and pesticides, oil or fluids from vehicles and harmful substances that wash off roofs and paved areas.
- Flood prevention – protects us from flooding and drainage problems
- Habitat friendly – provides valuable habitat for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. NOT mosquitoes.
- Aesthetic pleasure – enhances the beauty of our surroundings.

Where to locate the rain garden?

Locate the garden either near the house to catch only roof runoff or farther out on the lawn to collect water from both the roof and the lawn. It may be tempting to put the rain garden where water already pools but don't! The goal is to improve infiltration and the wet patches show where infiltration in the yard is slow.

Ideal place for the garden:

- At least 10 feet from the house, so it does not seep into the foundation (can be up to 30 feet from the house)
- At least 8 feet from a well
- At least 5 feet from a septic system
- Not directly over a sewer lateral or buried utilities
- In a gently, not steeply sloped area
- Not where water already ponds up
- Not where tree roots are
- Not in an area of heavy foot traffic

Size and depth of the rain garden?

A typical residential rain garden ranges from 100-300 square feet.

Things to consider:

- How deep the garden will be
- What type of soil you have
- Sandy soil has the fastest infiltration
- Clay soil takes longer to absorb water
 - 12-48 hours to drain
- How much roof and/or lawn area will drain into the garden

A typical rain garden is between 3-8 inches deep and the slope of the lawn determines the depth of the garden.

Rain garden construction tips

- Lawn or sod must be removed (6-12 inches of soil) and then tilled up and compost and/or sand added to increase water infiltration depending upon your soil conditions
- A berm is needed to keep the water in the garden
- Excellent information for sizing and constructing the garden in the DNR publication on Rain Gardens

What to plant in the rain garden?

- Plants that bloom at different times throughout the year
- Plants that vary in height, shape, texture and color
- Include sedges and grasses with your flowers
- Hardy for Wisconsin – native plants are ideal
- Meets sun/shade and soil requirements
- Can withstand water inundation and drought cycles

Maintenance and care of the rain garden

Little effort is needed once the plants are established, however the first year some regular watering and weeding are needed to get the plants off on a good start. Later years thinning out of plants will be needed as the plants mature.

Let it rain!