



# The Ecology Action Center News

Fall 2010

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## Rain Gardens: Fashionable and Environmentally Friendly

By Ellen Kozak, EAC Intern

Why not try something different in your yard by being modern and green at the same time!! Stormwater runoff is one of the major contributing factors to pollution in our drinking water; up to 70% of the pollutants in our streams, rivers and lakes is caused by stormwater pollution. An easy solution to reduce water pollution can begin in your backyard.

Rain gardens are simply gardens or landscaping features with an underlying purpose to help slow stormwater, giving it more time to infiltrate and less time to pick up pollutants on the ground or other impervious surfaces. How can they do this? Rain gardens have a bowl-shaped design that's allows them to capture stormwater and filter out excessive nutrients and other pollutants. The best part about these rain gardens is that they can be any size and designed to match your own personal tastes.

Rain gardens can be 30 to 40% more efficient than regular lawns at absorption and filtration. In addition, rain gardens also help by keeping more moisture on your property, thereby decreasing the need to water your lawn and gardens. Rain gardens can also help reduce potential for home flooding and other stormwater problems on your property. Ultimately, the rainwater filtered by your rain garden may help recharge the groundwater instead of being sent elsewhere by the storm sewer system.



*Newly installed rain garden at Davis Lodge on Lake Bloomington*

### Some useful tips for creating your own rain garden:

- \* When picking your location, make sure your rain garden is at least 10 feet from your house to prevent flooding into your house. You should choose a naturally occurring low spot which will help direct the rain fall to your garden. If you are digging your rain garden make sure its 4 to 6 inches deep.
- \* When choosing what plants to put into your garden, consider native plants. Native plants are the best adapted to local weather, soils, in that they are drought and pest resistant and usually require no fertilizers and no watering once established. If you do choose to use other plants to make sure that they can flourish in both wet and dry conditions.
- \* Mulch your rain garden approximately 2 to 3 inches deep to help reduce weeds and hold in moisture.
- \* Consult the EAC website for more details on designing your rain garden: <http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/clean-water/rain-gardens.shtml>
- \* Visit the new rain garden installed by EAC volunteers and staff at Davis Lodge on Lake Bloomington for inspiration. Better yet, visit it after a major rain event to see how it works!

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9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Monday—Friday



# Fall at the EAC

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## Composting – As You Like It!!

By Kris Hall

One of the most exciting things about a new job is the opportunity to learn new things. In the past few months, I have endeavored to become a resource for people who want to compost. A large amount of solid waste that ends up in the landfill could be composted, and at the EAC we are committed to helping people in their quest to make less garbage. So I have drawn from my own experience, books, websites and asking lots of people for their opinions about this fascinating way to turn garbage into gold. Here's the most important thing I have gleaned from all this research:



*Just do it! You can't mess it up.*

Everybody has a different idea about the "right" way to compost. But I have figured out that there isn't a "wrong" way. You can use a bin or a pile or a special container. You can turn it, chop the material into little pieces, pay close attention to ratio of greens to browns, monitor the

temperature... or you can do none of those things. The simple fact is that organic material will eventually decompose.

If your goal is to produce high quality fertilizer in a short amount of time, you will want to pay attention to the details. Your bin should be at least 3 cubic feet, and should have a nice mixture of "greens" (nitrogen-rich wet materials) to "browns" (carbon-rich dry materials). Materials going into the bin should be chopped into small pieces, and you should stir your bin a few times a week. It should be kept somewhat moist, about the dampness of wrung-out sponge. With the right mixture of greens and browns, the pile should become "hot" and the heat-producing bacteria will continue working, even in the winter! If you get it going now, you should have great material to mix in with your garden soil when it's time to plant flowers and vegetables next spring!

If all of this sounds like too much work, you can still get good fertilizer from your kitchen and landscape waste. Just toss it all in a container with air holes or put it in a pile in the corner of your yard or garden. Stir it around a bit if you want to, or just let it take care of itself. The rain, sun, air and a myriad of decomposers, ranging from single celled bacteria to earthworms, will do the rest. It will take a little longer, but it will still work.

There are just a few important things to remember. Never put meat scraps, dairy products or carnivorous animal waste in your pile. The list of things you CAN compost is amazingly long. For details, check the EAC's website.

Your methods are up to you. The decomposing is up to the critters. And the resulting material is magic! Have fun!



***the most effective method to dispose of latex paint is to pour an appropriate amount onto several layers of newspaper and let it dry...***

## Ask the EAC

The EAC wants your questions about environmental issues! Here are some of the questions we have received this month.

**Question: I have tons of paint from over that last couple years that is just sitting in my basement. How can I get rid of it?**

*If it is latex paint the most effective method is to pour an appropriate amount onto several layers of newspaper and let it dry. After it is completely dry, roll it up and throw it in the trash. The steel container can even be recycled if it is clean. If it is oil based paint, it is a household hazardous waste which means it needs to be taken to a household hazardous waste collection event or facility. Unfortunately due to state budget cutbacks no collection events are being scheduled right now. But you can sign up to be notified for future events at the EAC website using the red box on the left side of the page. You can also try offering your paint for reuse by others on the McLean County Freecycle site at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/McFreecycle/>*

**Question: How do I dispose of unused fertilizers and pesticides?**

*Like oil-based paints, these too are considered household hazardous waste items and need to wait for a collection event. Sign up for our email notification list at our website or try and find someone who can use these items through Freecycle or in your neighborhood.*

**Question: Can I recycle CFLs? If yes, where can I recycle them?**

*YES, you can recycle compact fluorescent light bulbs. Here are the five locations where you can recycle them:*

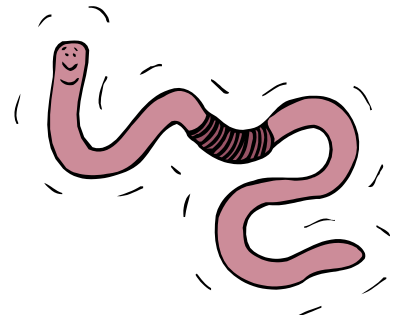
- *Town of Normal, Facilities Management Parking Lot- 207 S. Linden*
- *City of Bloomington Public Service compound at Jackson Street & East Street*
- *Springfield Electric- 902 Four Seasons Road in Bloomington*
- *Ecology Action Center- 202 W College Avenue in Normal*
- *Home Depot- 795 Veteran's Parkway in Normal*

**Send your questions to [eac@ecologyactioncenter.org](mailto:eac@ecologyactioncenter.org) or call us at (309) 454-3169 during regular hours.**

### Coming Soon: Vermicomposting Workshop For Families

Thursday, December 2, 5:30-6:30 pm

Did you know that all the fruit and vegetable scraps from your kitchen could turn into fabulous fertilizer for your garden? And that you don't need a big outdoor spot for a traditional compost pile? The answer is WORMS!! Bring your family to this workshop, learn about the magic of worms, and go home with your very own vermicompost bin!



This program is designed for families with children ages 5 and up. For more details and registration information, please visit

[www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org).

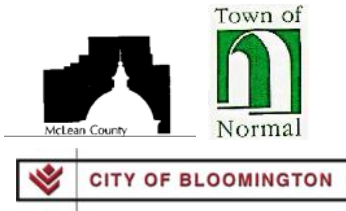
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## Calendar of Upcoming Events

**October 17, 1 p.m.: Screening of Living Downstream with Sandra Steingraber at the Normal Theater.** Tickets available at the Garlic Press for \$8. More information available at [www.thelandconnection.org](http://www.thelandconnection.org).

**October 28, 29, 30: Illinois Energy Expo at the Marriott Hotel in Normal.** Details available at [www.apec-online.org](http://www.apec-online.org).

**November 11, 5:30 p.m.: The Sustainable Gourmet—Winetasting Fundraiser.** This fun annual event supports the efforts of the Ecology Action Center to inspire and assist residents of McLean County in creating, strengthening, and preserving a healthy environment. The Sustainable Gourmet is sponsored by Medici in Normal and takes place in the upstairs room at their facility at 120 North Street; tickets are \$35 each and are available online at [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org) or may be purchased in person at the EAC. Space is limited, buy your tickets before the November 8 deadline. For more information call (309) 454-3169.

**November 13, 10 a.m.: America Recycles Day with EAC at the Children's Discovery Museum.** Celebrate the three R's and investigate composting with activities such as recycled paper, recycle bracelets, compost worms and more! Free with paid admission.

**December 2, 5:30 p.m.: Vermicomposting Workshop For Families.** Registration forms and more details available at [www.ecologyactioncenter.org](http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org).