

RAIN GARDENS



YARD SMART 2011 – Fact Sheet #7 *from the* **ECOLOGY ACTION CENTER**

What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is an attractive landscaping feature planted with perennial native plants. It is a bowl-shaped garden, designed to absorb stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces such as roofs and parking lots. Rain gardens can be small, formal, home-owner style gardens, large complex bioretention gardens, or any size in between.

Why would you want a rain garden?

Rain is natural; stormwater is not. Up to 70% of the pollution in our streams, rivers and lakes is carried there by stormwater. Although most people never think about stormwater, about half of the pollution that stormwater carries comes from things we do in our yards and gardens!

A rain garden is a natural solution that keeps rain where it falls. You get a lovely garden *and* you help protect our rivers, streams and lakes from stormwater pollution. Your rain garden can filter out pollutants, it can recharge groundwater, and it can reduce stormwater flow, all of which help the environment. You can be part of a beautiful solution!

What kinds of plants will you use?

We recommend using native plants (or a combination of cultivated varieties and natives) in your rain garden since they are uniquely adapted to thriving in the local weather, soils, and ecosystems. They have been working at it for years and can live through droughts and downpours, and survive the winters without special care. Native plants have deep roots and help protect the water quality in your neighborhood. Native plants also have relationships with local butterflies, insects, birds, animals and other plants that they have developed by living together over thousands of years. Planting natives in your landscape helps provide habitat for local wildlife, and native plants will thrive with little care, once established. (Designing the garden for easy maintenance is part of your planning process.) You can pick tall plants for privacy, or short plants to preserve your view.

A rain garden is a GARDEN!

Remember that a rain garden is not merely a functioning infiltration system. Rain gardens can and should be beautiful, attractive improvement to your property. You can choose and arrange your plantings to delight and please the eye. You can expect and should plan for songbirds, butterflies, colors, fragrances, and sounds. Rain gardens also tend to become wildlife oases; you may have squirrels, rabbits, or deer visiting your garden regularly.

How do you get started? For specific details on designing and building your rain garden, preparing the site and defining the borders, see our website at:

<http://www.ecologyactioncenter.org/clean-water/rain-gardens.shtml>