



Plant a Rain Garden!

What is it? A rain garden, also known as a recharge garden, is a small, vegetated plot with a strong emphasis on aesthetics. You can install a rain garden in your yard to capture and hold precipitation that is recharged to the soil and slowly taken up by plants. Roof leaders from your home, garage or barn can also be directed to the rain garden. This reduces the amount of runoff from your property and recharges rainwater on site, reducing stormwater impacts.

What and where to plant. The gardens need to be sited according to soil type, existing wetness, sunlight and other growing factors, tailored to the needs of the plants that are chosen, placed in your existing yard. Native species of plants are preferable since they can perform well after being established and, if properly chosen, will adapt to the garden with little maintenance. Showy native perennials such as cardinal flower (*lobelia cardinalis*) and butterfly weed (*asclepias tuberosa*) are tough plants that will also attract butterflies and hummingbirds and are readily available at local nurseries and native plant sales.

Why a Rain Garden? The birds, butterflies, and other beneficial insects will be attracted to the rain garden for the habitat, wildlife cover, and food it provides. The garden offers added value to the homeowner who benefits from the noise buffer and quality of life bonus. The enjoyment that comes from watching butterflies and birds or listening to toads on a spring evening cannot be matched by the pipes and gutters that are usually the homeowner's piece of a stormwater system.

In stormwater best management practice language, a rain garden is a bioretention area. A bioretention area is a shallow depression combined with a mixture of sand and soils that are planted with native vegetation that absorb and filter runoff. The advantage of this low-tech version of a bioretention area is that they are inexpensive to install and maintain and can be retrofitted into an existing landscape. The individual nature of the garden allows for fine-tuning to fit your personal needs and aesthetics.

How to Maintain? The first step is correct siting of the rain garden. It needs to be placed where the rain will be captured, the slope and drainage of the property (a low spot or an area can be dug out and filled with a healthy soil and humus mixture) and on proximity to the rooftops that you want to drain. Carefully choose the plants so that plants that like wet feet (such as cardinal flower and swamp milkweed) will be in the moist soil and plants such as asters and butterfly weed will be in the drier edges. Occasional removal of invasive plants is required and should be done manually. Pesticides, herbicides, and artificial fertilizers should be avoided except for organic, non-toxic controls. Once your garden is established, it will be very low-maintenance and self-sustaining, providing years of enjoyment and runoff reduction benefits.

Delaware Riverkeeper Network
300 Pond Street, Second Floor
Bristol, PA 19007

tel: (215) 369-1188

fax: (215) 369-1181

drkn@delawareriverkeeper.org

www.delawareriverkeeper.org

Getting started. A list of ideal plants for a rain garden follows. Plants should provide multiple benefits including habitat, diversity, color, floral display and workhorse toughness. For more information, go to NJ Native Plant Society at www.npsnj.org

For wettest spots:

Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*)
Softstemmed bulrush (*Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani*)
Tussock sedge (*Carex stricta*)
Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)
Rose mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos*)
Blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*)
Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
Swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*)

For slightly wet areas:

Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*)
Sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)
Blue joint grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*)
Wool grass (*Scirpus cyperinus*)
Joe-pye weed (*Eupatorium fistulosum*)
Helianthus angustifolius (Swamp sunflower)
Cardinal flower and blue lobelia (*Lobelia cardinalis* and *siphilitica*)
Red Chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*)
Silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)
High bush blueberry (*Vaccinium corybosum*)

For drained edges:

Interrupted fern (*Osmunda claytoniana*)
Goldie's wood fern (*Dryopteris goldiana*)
Little bluestem grass (*Schizachyrium scoparium*)
Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)
Black-eyed susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida* and *hirta*)
Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*)
Blue wood aster and smooth blue aster (*Aster cordifolius* and *laevis*)
Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*)
Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*)
Low bush blueberry (*Vaccinium pallidum*)