

# Rain Gardens



**Information  
on  
Reducing  
Water  
Pollution  
through  
Gardening**

**Butler County  
Department of  
Recycling &  
Waste Management**

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## **What is a rain garden?**

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



## **Why do we need rain gardens?**

Rain is natural; excess stormwater runoff isn't. Government studies have shown that 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! Planting a rain garden may seem like a small thing, but if you calculate the amount of rain that runs off your roof, you would be very surprised. That rain is supposed to soak into the ground, but instead heads down the street to the storm drain, carrying pollution with it. Keeping rain where it falls, by putting it into a beautiful rain garden, is a natural solution. You not only get a lovely garden out of it, you have the added benefit of helping protect our rivers, streams and lakes from stormwater pollution. You can be part of a beautiful solution!

## **How To Build a Rain Garden**

Rain gardens are very easy to establish. The most difficult part of constructing one on an existing site is the removal of sod. Most gardens are established by digging a shallow depression in the ground. Sand, and/or gravel, mulch and soil are then layered into the rain garden site. A property may need more than one rain garden to capture all the runoff being produced.

Next plants are selected and placed in the garden. Hardy native plant species are your best bet. Trees and shrubs can also be used.



Rain gardens can work almost anywhere. Their location, size and effectiveness depend on such things as the amount of rain that moves from a house or building, the number and location of downspouts, soil types and plants used.

Maintenance is minimal once the rain garden is constructed. You may need to do some weeding as with any garden or

lawn and plants may have to be divided as they grow or replaced if they die.

Additional benefits:

- Efficiently and effectively filters a substantial amount of polluted runoff.
- Attracts birds and butterflies
- Aesthetic landscaping for your property
- Helps recharge and renew neighborhood groundwater
- Slows the flow of water from a house or building
- Possible deterrent to flash flooding



### **For More Information**

*Butler County Department of Recycling & Waste Management—Phone 724.284.5305*

### **WEB SITES**

*Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources—<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/runoff/rg/>*

*Rain Garden Basics from West Michigan—<http://www.raingardens.org/Index.php>*

*Rain Gardens—A How-To manual for Homeowners—<http://dnr.wi.gov/runoff/rg/rgmanual.pdf>*

*Rain Gardens—A Household Way To Improve Water Quality in Your Community:  
<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/home.gardens.pdf>*

*Sue's Rules for Rain Gardens—<http://sueellingson.com/raingardens/>*

*10 Steps to building a Rain Garden—[http://natsci.edgewood.edu/wingra/management/raingardens/rain\\_build.htm](http://natsci.edgewood.edu/wingra/management/raingardens/rain_build.htm)*



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