

A Garden

With A Deeper Purpose



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During a downpour at a typical house in Wind Point, water gushes out of downspouts, across lawns treated with pesticides and fertilizers, into an oily street and, finally, down a storm drain that dumps that pollution along with the water into a stream or Lake Michigan. By building a rain garden, you can divert your gutter water into an attractive planting bed that works like a sponge and natural filter to clean the water and lets it percolate slowly into the surrounding village soil.

Why Build a Rain Garden?

The benefits of rain gardens are multiple and include their ability to perform the following functions:

- Help keep water clean by filtering stormwater runoff before it enters local waterways
- Help alleviate problems associated with flooding and drainage
- Enhance the beauty of individual yards and communities with native plants
- Provide habitat and food for wildlife including bees, birds and butterflies
- Recharge the ground water supply

Ready? Great! Read on for rain garden basics.

Building a Rain Garden

Pick a Good Site

Locate the rain garden so it receives discharge from a downspout or sheet flow from lawn areas or hard surfaces.

Layout the Garden

Develop a plan for the location, dimensions and depth of the rain garden. A useful resource for this simple bit of engineering is the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (WDNR) publication *Rain Gardens: A How-To Manual for Homeowners*, available online as a free PDF download. Choose plant species and sketch a design for your rain garden while considering height, color and bloom time. Many design examples are found in the WDNR's manual.

Call Diggers Hotline

Always call Digger's Hotline (1-800-242-8511) at least three business days before you start digging. Diggers Hotline will mark with flags the underground locations of electrical (red), natural gas (yellow), cable TV/communication (orange), water (blue), sewers (green), and/or proposed excavation (white).



A rain garden can divert your gutter water into an attractive planting bed that works like a sponge and natural filter to clean the water and let it percolate slowly into the surrounding soil.

Excavating your Rain Garden

Many rain gardens are excavated by hand by homeowners or volunteers. Rain garden excavation day is a great day to invite your friends over for a work party! If you use heavy equipment, do not drive into the garden where machinery can compact the soil and significantly

reduce infiltration. Dig the garden to the depth calculated in the WDNR's manual or a similar resource and heap the soil around the edge for the berm. The goal is a flat and level bottom. You can use a carpenter's level mounted on a 2X4 and move it around the garden, filling and digging as needed until the surface is level.

Build the Berm

In most gardens, a berm will be needed to keep water in the garden so it can infiltrate into the ground. The berm should end up no taller than ankle height and is to be covered with about three inches of mulch to protect it from weeds and turf grass.

Planting the Garden

Lay a grid of 1'x1' squares across your garden using string and stakes. Set plants in the grid in their containers. For each transplant, dig each hole twice as wide as the plant and keep the crown of the plant level with the existing grade. Fill the hole and tamp down to avoid air pockets. Label each plant for easy identification in following years. Once planted, spread three inches of shredded hardwood mulch throughout the garden and on the berm. Mulch helps keep moisture in the garden and protects it from the spread of weeds.

Maintaining Your Rain Garden

Water your rain garden immediately after planting and continue to water twice a week for four weeks. In the first year, water again if there is a drought. Do not water after the first year.

Weed the garden as needed by removing by hand only the plants you know are weeds. Keep the hardwood mulch at a depth of three inches for the first three years to help control weeds. Do not ever fertilize! Leave the plants with their stems and seed-heads standing over winter for bird habitat and cut back in the spring when the new growth is four to six inches tall.

Please contact Root-Pike Watershed Initiative Network for more information on building a rain garden, purchasing native plants, calculating the cost and impact of your rain garden, as well as other tips on ways you can help reduce stormwater runoff pollution on your own property. You can contact us at 262-898-2055 or email me at allison@rootpikewin.org for your convenience. Thank you, Wind Point!