

Rain Garden – The Garden With A Goal

Reprinted with permission from Calumet County, Calumet Conservator Winter 2005 Newsletter

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a way to reduce polluted runoff, recharge groundwater, and enhance your landscaping all at the same time? There is: rain gardens.

Rain gardens are landscaped beds that are designed to capture rainwater from roofs, driveways, or lawns. The rainwater is either used by the plants or it filters through the ground to become clean groundwater, rather than running off into a storm sewer or ditch.

Runoff from a typical yard is polluted with fertilizers, herbicides, auto fluids, soil, leaves, grass clippings, and other contaminants. These pollutants are carried straight to rivers and lakes by our stormsewer and ditch systems. By capturing runoff, rain gardens reduce surface water contamination and mitigate flooding.

Rain Garden Info

Statistics

★ Rain Gardens reduce runoff from your yard by 25% (if built at a size of 5-7% of the drainage area. 1 acre = 43,560 ft²). The drainage area is probably not your whole lot; maybe it is just part of the roof and the lawn between house and garden.). The rain garden can be up to 30% smaller than this and still control nearly 90% of your annual runoff.

★ Rain gardens should be 20-30% of the roof area

★ A 180 ft² rain garden traps 8000+ gallons of water per year

★ There is 9 times more runoff from a city block than from a forest of the same size. These are two extremes on a runoff continuum, in which lawns are somewhere in the middle. Rain gardens improve the performance of lawns on this runoff scale.

Benefits

★ Slow runoff, allowing it to filter through soil. This recharges the aquifer with clean water and protects nearby streams from receiving contaminated runoff.

★ Protect against flooding by reducing stormwater runoff.

★ Reduce the need for watering.

★ Less lawn to mow: saves time and gasoline.

★ Attractive to birds and butterflies

Other Helpful Info

★ Properly designed rain gardens will hold standing water for a few hours after a rain event, but never more than a day after a rain. Mosquitoes need 7 to 12 days to lay and hatch eggs, so rain gardens are not a mosquito factory.

★ A shallow swale or a 4" plastic underground drain tile can be used to direct water from the downspout to the garden.

★ Gardens in clayey soils should be deeper and larger than those in sandy soils.

For more information, contact your county UW-Extension educator.