

Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are becoming increasingly popular in the home and municipal landscapes. A rain garden is a natural or dug shallow depression planted with suitable native trees, shrubs, flowers, and other plants to resemble a beautiful landscape feature. In addition to beauty, rain gardens have the added benefit of protecting water quality. Rain gardens are designed to capture and soak up stormwater runoff from your roof or other impervious areas around your home, such as driveways, walkways, rooftops, or even compacted lawn areas. If left to run into the storm drain, this runoff would carry pollutants such as sediment, oil, fertilizers and pesticides straight into the nearest lake, stream, or river.

Stormwater runoff is considered one of the main sources of water pollution nationwide. As watersheds become more urbanized, the increase in paved surfaces prevents rainwater from infiltrating into the ground as it would in the natural hydrologic cycle. This dramatic increase in stormwater runoff can result in:

- Long-term lowering of groundwater tables and loss of stream flow during dry weather.
- Increased erosion of urban waterways.
- Decreased water quality caused by pollutants in stormwater runoff.
- Flooding – especially more frequent “flash” flooding.

A rain garden will allow the runoff generated on your property to infiltrate into the ground and help to reduce potential water quality problems. While your individual rain garden may seem like a small contribution, collectively, rain gardens can produce large-scale water quality benefits.

In addition to reducing and filtering stormwater runoff and increasing groundwater recharge, rain gardens provide many other benefits. They:

- Provide habitat for wildlife and, with the proper plants, increase the number and diversity of birds and butterflies.
- Provide an attractive and creative alternative to traditional lawn landscapes.
- Require less maintenance than lawns because they do not need to be mowed, fertilized, or watered once established.
- Increase property values with creative landscaping designs.
- Reduce storm drain overload and flooding if adopted on a community or neighborhood scale.

For more information, or to learn how to build a rain garden on your property, contact Muskegon Conservation District at 231-773-0008.

Resources: Healthy Landscapes, Clean Water Starts at Home, University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Education Program
<http://www.uri.edu/ce/healthylandscapes/raingarden.htm>