



Hennepin County Environmental Services

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Rain gardens adds beauty and benefits the environment

The quality of lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands in Minnesota is threatened by increasing pollution. When it rains, the stormwater that runs off driveways, lawns, houses and parking lots can carry pollutants like oil, paint and chemicals down storm drains and into nearby lakes, streams and rivers. Homeowners can install a special kind of garden, called a rain garden, to help water infiltrate into the ground rather than run off into storm drains.

A rain garden is simply a garden with a shallow depression designed to catch rainwater from your yard, roof or driveway. These gardens are filled with deep rooted native plants that can tolerate flooding and drought conditions. The plants and soil in a rain garden absorb pollutants and pull out sediment as the water infiltrates into the ground. The gardens are designed to tolerate periods of wet and saturated soils, holding water for 24 to 48 hours.

Rain gardens provide beautiful landscaping and habitat for birds and butterflies. By soaking up rain where it falls, they slow stormwater runoff, help prevent erosion, and remove pollutants. This improves water quality and helps communities alleviate localized flooding problems.

Rain gardens are easy to maintain. The first season will require regular watering and weeding until the plants are established. As with any other perennial garden, plants need to be cut back in the spring and plants may need to be divided every few years. Sediment and debris that flows into the garden with the rain water should be removed when necessary.

Rain gardens do require some expertise to ensure they are designed and constructed properly. There are numerous resources available to homeowners who are interested in creating a rain garden:

- Metro Blooms (www.metroblooms.org) offers workshops to teach homeowners how to design and install rain gardens.
- Blue Thumb (www.bluethumb.org) has examples of rain garden projects, a video of how to build a rain garden, project cost calculator and a comprehensive guide on designing and installing rain gardens for the upper Midwest region.
- Many landscape designers, services and nurseries have staff who are knowledgeable on rain garden design and installation.

For more information on rain gardens and other actions you can take to protect water quality, visit www.hennepin.us/water.

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Editor's Note

This sample newsletter article was provided by Hennepin County as a part of a coordinated education campaign with the county's watershed organizations. If you have any questions about the campaign, please contact Angie Timmons at 612-348-2477. Published June 2009.