



Montmorency Conservation District
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Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are just what they sound like—gardens that soak up rain water, mainly from your roof, but also from your driveway and lawn. It is a depression—natural or created—in the landscape, designed to trap stormwater runoff. The landscaped areas are planted with wildflowers and other native vegetation to replace areas of lawn. The gardens fill with a few inches of water and allow the water to slowly filter into the ground rather than running off to storm drains.

Holding back the runoff helps prevent pollutants such as fertilizers from washing off your yard and eventually into nearby streams and lakes. By reducing the amount of water that enters the local storm drain systems, rain gardens can also reduce the chances for local flooding. In addition, rain gardens help minimize bank and shoreline damage from runoff into streams and lakes.

Lawn grass, because of thick root systems, does not absorb and hold water, as you might think, and in a heavy downpour can funnel water away from the yard and into the street. But a rain garden can catch that runoff and filter the water.

Native plants offer many advantages in a rain garden. Typically, native plants require less water and fertilizer than non-native species—and many are naturally resistant to pests. They also have extensive root systems that improve the permeability of the soil, and the uptake of the water. When selected to fit site conditions, native plants create small ecosystems, attracting birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects.

Rain gardens are not just for homeowners. Frequently they are found in parks, rest areas, and schools. Many business owners are incorporating rain gardens into their landscaping plans to accommodate runoff from roofs and parking lots.

In 2005 the city of Grayling partnered with a number of state and local organizations to initiate a variety of projects to help reduce stormwater runoff into the AuSable River. One part of that project was the installation of 86 rain gardens. The goal was to reduce runoff by 80%. Project organizers feel the rain gardens have met and possibly exceeded that goal.

Rain gardens can be an integral part of our stormwater management and environmental approach. Their use doesn't involve a lot of centralized planning. They don't require much space, can be fitted into oddball shapes, and can be readily added to existing buildings. They look nice, and you don't need to be an engineer to build one. Anyone can make a rain garden -- including you!

For more information visit one or more of these excellent websites.

Rain garden construction tips: a one page quickie

http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/drain_commissioner/dc_webWaterQuality/rain-gardens/tour/gardentips.html

Rouge River brochure—short and to the point; contains a list of recommended plants
<http://www.socwa.org/nature/PDF/Rain%20Gardens.pdf>

Rain Garden brochure – WI: 8 pages of “how-to” with plenty of pictures.
<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/home.gardens.pdf>

Rain Gardens of West Michigan: This is an entire website devoted to rain gardens.
http://www.raingardens.org/Create_A_Garden.php

Rain Gardens: A how to manual for homeowners—this is an extensive 32 page booklet with lots of tips, garden layout diagrams, and pictures.
<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/home.rgmanual.pdf>

MDOT – Michigan Department of Transportation is experimenting with rain gardens on various sites.
<http://www.michigan.gov/stormwatermgt/0,1607,7-205--212265--,00.html>