Building a Rain Garden

What is a Rain Garden?

Rain gardens are specially designed gardens that collect and infiltrate stormwater from driveways and heavily compacted lawns. They can be as manicured or natural as the gardener chooses, and though typically planted with native vegetation, ornamentals certainly may be used for variety. Building a rain garden is a great way for individuals to get involved in improving our lakes and rivers.

Why Plant a Rain Garden?

Rain & melted snow run off our roofs, driveways & yards, into our streets, through the storm system, and eventually to our lakes & rivers. This water is untreated and carries all sorts of pollutants such as leaves, grass, oil, salt, fertilizer, pet waste, and pesticides. Rain gardens retain the water before it leaves your yard and keep the pollutants in the garden, where they can be absorbed into the soil.

Rain gardens have the potential to soak up significantly more water than a regular lawn, improving water quality, replenishing groundwater, and reducing the chances for localized flooding. They also happen to be beautiful and provide habitat for beneficial critters: birds, bees, butterflies, & dragonflies.

Learn more @ myfairlakes.com

Left: Prairie Dropseed
Center: Spiderwort
Right: Prairie Blazingstar
All photos graciously submitted by J. Bertolacini
## Designing the Garden

Choosing the location of your garden can seem a little daunting to some. You will want to stay 10 feet from your house’s foundation to avoid seepage. The best location would likely be fairly close to your downspouts if you intend to direct roof water to your garden. Make your garden as big as you are willing and able to maintain. There are some rules of thumb, but you can always change it if you feel it’s too small or too big.

## Site Preparation

The amount of preparation required depends on your soil. If your soil is easy to dig into and water drains fairly quickly, you likely only need to remove any grass and create a 6-8 inch depression to allow water to pond temporarily. If your soil is hard, you will want to remove a few extra inches of soil and add compost to help loosen it up and improve infiltration before planting. Amazingly, some plants can push their roots through the toughest soils, and open up small channels to allow water to soak in. Look into “clay busters” if you have exceptionally tight soils.

## Planting

Plant selection can also be confusing, but have fun with it. If designed properly, a rain garden will not hold water for very long, and so “wetland plants” may not be the best option. Instead select native plants that can handle a fluctuation in water levels. Talk to your local greenhouse about what plants they recommend or see below for some suggestions.

### Pick & Choose or Select Your Own

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sun Requirement</th>
<th>Plant Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Sun (6+ hrs)</td>
<td>Black-Eyed Susan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial Sun (3-6 hrs)</td>
<td>False Rue Anemone, Virginia Mountain Mint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Shade (0-3 hrs)</td>
<td>Monarda, Purple Joe-Pye Weed</td>
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</tbody>
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### Bloom Times

- **May:** Prairie Blazingstar, Anise Hyssop
- **June:** Butterflyweed, Calico Aster, Canada Anemone, Virginia Mountain Mint, Marsh Phlox
- **July:** Lanceleaf Coreopsis, Spiderwort, Bright Star, Wild Geranium, Woodland Phlox
- **Aug.:** Black-Eyed Susan, False Rue Anemone, Sky Blue Aster, Zig Zag Goldenrod
- **Sept.:** Orange Coneflower, Sky Blue Aster, Calico Aster, Zig Zag Goldenrod
- **Oct.:** Ginger, False Rue Anemone, Sky Blue Aster

**GRASSES/SEDGES**

- Common Oak Sedge, Sideoats Grama Grass, Little Bluestem, Prairie Dropseed, Silky Wild Rye

#### Bloom Times May Vary