

# Tips For Planting A Rain Garden

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A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression designed to capture rain and snowmelt as it drains from an impervious surface. This allows the water to seep into the ground, helping to recharge the groundwater supply.

*A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression designed to capture rain and snowmelt as it drains from an impervious surface.*



*This residential rain garden captures rainfall from the gutters. Note the raised berm around the edges. Depending on its size and soil type, a rain garden may be a little as 3" deep.*



*A small residential rain garden, this one receives runoff from a patio and overflow from rain barrels at the corner of the house.*

In the process, the plants and soil help cleanse the water of pollutants. Since the water in the rain garden drains in a matter of hours, it is not a breeding place for mosquitoes.

## RAIN GARDENS MANAGE STORMWATER RUNOFF

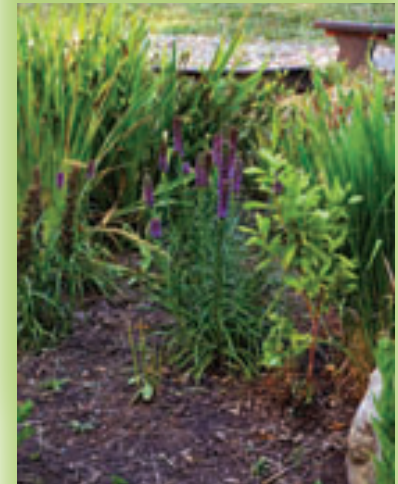
Increased development calls for better stormwater management to handle runoff from roofs, roads, driveways, parking lots, and even compacted lawn areas. This water flows into storm sewers, and then out to streams, estuaries and the ocean. The runoff carries sediment, petroleum products, and lawn chemicals which contribute to the degradation of our waterways and pose a threat to wildlife. Compared to a conventional lawn, a rain garden allows about 30% more water to soak into the ground, helping to offset the impacts of development.

The appropriate size and location for a rain garden depends on several factors, but a typical residential rain garden is between 100 and 300 square feet. It can be professionally designed and installed, but is not a difficult project for a homeowner.

Planning is the most important step, so take your time and do it right. Some sources for detailed information on planning and installing a rain garden are listed at the end of this article. If you have limited space available, remember that a rain garden can be up to 30% smaller and still control almost 90% of the annual runoff. Furthermore, the first 20 minutes of a storm is when most pollution is carried off to streams.



*A type of plover called the Killdeer is drawn to this large, professionally designed rain garden in located in an urban setting at the Midtown Community School in Neptune.*



*A section of rain garden installed by the Monmouth County Master Gardeners at the Agricultural Building on Kozloski Rd., in Freehold.*

## DO'S AND DON'TS FOR SITE SELECTION

- Place the rain garden where it will intercept water running off a roof, driveway, road or other impervious surface.
- A rain garden should be at least 10 feet from the house so infiltrating water doesn't seep into the foundation.
- Do not place the rain garden directly over a septic system.
- Do not put the rain garden in a part of the yard where water already ponds.
- It is better to build the rain garden in full or partial sun, not directly under a big tree.
- Putting the rain garden in a flatter part of the yard will make digging much easier.
- Locate utility lines by calling NJ One Call 1-800-272-1000 at least three days before digging for a free markout of underground utility lines. Stay at least five feet horizontally and one foot vertically from any utilities.

## DESIGNING YOUR RAIN GARDEN

Plants selected must be able to tolerate widely fluctuating moisture levels. A variety of such plants are available to suit your needs, whether you prefer a neat and restrained garden or a more natural appearance. Native plants are often chosen for rain gardens because they:

- Require little long-term maintenance if they are properly planted;
- Produce long root systems to hold soil in place;
- Add beauty to the landscape and preserve our natural heritage; and
- Provide food and habitat for native wildlife.

For greater interest, include plants of varied heights, bloom time and color, and overall texture. Planting them in groups of 3, 5 or 7 will give the best appearance. Be sure to also include some plants that will provide winter interest with berries, evergreen foliage or exfoliating or colored bark.

## MAINTAINING A RAIN GARDEN

During the first year plants will require supplemental water during dry periods. Weeding is also crucial during the first few years until the garden has filled in. Once the garden is established, however, maintenance is minimal, requiring only periodic mulching, light pruning and thinning. Fertilizing is usually not needed.

Spring is an excellent time to install a rain garden, as digging will be easier. Early fall, however, will allow the plants time to establish new roots before the soil temperature drops, and your rain garden will be ready to handle winter snowmelt and the abundant spring rains.

Further information is available in the Horticultural Library at Deep Cut Gardens and through the following organizations:

**Rutgers Water Resource Program** [www.water.rutgers.edu](http://www.water.rutgers.edu) or the Rutgers Master Gardeners of Monmouth County, 732-303-7604

The **Rutgers Fact Sheet FS513 "Rain Gardens"** can be accessed from [www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs](http://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs)

**The Native Plant Society of New Jersey** 102 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8519, [www.npsnj.org](http://www.npsnj.org)

**Rain Gardens: A How-to Manual for Homeowners.** Riger Bannerman and Ellen Considine <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/pdf/home.rgmanual.pdf>

## SPECIES WELL-SUITED TO RAIN GARDEN CONDITIONS (Intermittent wet and dry periods)

### PERENNIALS

- Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
- Blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*)
- Columbine (*Aquilegia*)
- Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
- Daylilies (*Hemerocallis*)
- Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*)
- Lilyturf (*Liriope spicata*)
- New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*)
- Plaintain lily (*Hosta*)
- Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)

### TREES

- Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)
- River birch (*Betula nigra*)
- Sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)

### FERNS & SEDGES

- Royal fern (*Osumunda regalis*)
- Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*)
- Tussock sedge (*Carex stipata*)

### SHRUBS

- Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*)
- Inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*)
- Red twig dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)
- Winterberry holly (*Ilex verticillata*)



*Black-eyed Susan*



*Purple Coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)*



*Winterberry Holly*



*Blue flag iris*