



# Rain Gardens

When you plant and maintain a rain garden, the immediate gratification is obvious. The attractive flowers and plants enhance your yard and add beauty to your surroundings. But the most important benefits don't meet the eye. Rain gardens are a big part of the answer to minimizing the negative environmental effects of storm water runoff. But before you decide to install one in your yard, you may have a few questions. Here are a few of the most common ones, along with answers.

## BEST PRACTICE AREA: SURFACE AND GROUNDWATER RESOURCES

### DID YOU KNOW?

A "right-sized" rain garden should be approximately 20-30% of the area of the building roof. A 180 square foot rain garden can capture over 8,000 gallons of water per year.

### GET MONEY FOR YOUR GARDEN:

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has grant money available for rain garden projects. So, if you own property in Stearns County and have been thinking about building a rain garden, now is the time! Call 320-251-7800 x 3 to determine if your project is eligible for technical assistance including up to 75% of costs.

### BENEFITS OF A RAIN GARDEN:

- By increasing the amount of water filtered into the ground, rain gardens contribute to groundwater recharge.
- It helps protect communities from flooding and drainage problems. During a storm huge amounts of water normally runs off from the roofs of houses and infrastructure together with dried leaves and other garbage to the drain. Rain garden can be a part of stormwater reduction to minimize combined sewer overflows.
- Rain gardens protect streams and lakes from stormwater carrying pollutants like lawn fertilizers, pesticides, oil and other fluids that leak from vehicles, and other harmful substances that can kill or drive off aquatic animals.
- Rain gardens are nice landscaping features that add beauty to the yard and neighborhood. It can also save you money because the plants do not need fertilizers which makes your yard a healthier place for kids. It also reduces the amount of lawn you have to maintain.
- Rain gardens provide wildlife habitat for butterflies, birds, and other insects. These insects help drive away mosquitoes, too.

### COMMON QUESTIONS—SIMPLE ANSWERS:

**What exactly is a Rain Garden?** A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression that allows rain and snowmelt to be collected and seep naturally into the ground. This helps recharge our groundwater supply and prevents a water quality problem called polluted runoff (nonpoint source pollution). Rain gardens are an important way to make our cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live while enhancing ecological health.

**How much does a rain garden cost?** Rain gardens cost about the same as other perennial flower gardens, and are less expensive than replanting annuals every year. Do-it-yourselfers can put in a garden for \$3-5/square foot. Use a landscaper to plan and install, and you're looking at \$10-15/square foot or more. Plants are the single most expensive item.

**Is a rain garden a pond?** Rain gardens are designed to hold water for no more than a couple of days. Unlike ponds, you don't need costly pumps, electricity, or filters. In fact, a rain garden is a filter for the water that runs off of your property's impervious surfaces.

**How much maintenance is required?** Less than a regular garden, if you use native plants. They adapt well to their natural surroundings, and don't need fertilizers or pesticides. While your natives are establishing their roots, water them every other day or so for two to three weeks, or until you see that they're thriving. After that, you'll never need to water them except during a prolonged dry spell.

**Won't it attract mosquitoes?** Properly installed, your rain garden shouldn't hold water long enough for mosquito larvae to complete their 7-to-12-day life cycle. Rain gardens also attract dragonflies, who find mosquitoes quite tasty.

**Do I have to use native plants?** You don't have to use plants native to Central Minnesota, but there are many advantages. Natives have adapted to our climate and are much better at handling the periodic inundation that goes along with a rain garden. They'll also save you the time and money of replanting every year, and offer much greater wildlife value.

**What about winter?** Even though your plants will be dormant in the winter, gardens can still help slow down water movement and enable it to be absorbed into the ground. Water may remain longer, particularly when the ground is frozen, but that's not a problem in winter.

**Can it be too large or too small?** With the help of a landscaper or other professional, you can size your garden to handle all the rain that normally falls here. But even if you can't install a garden big enough, every little bit helps.

