

# How to Build a Rain Garden

## Location

Rain gardens can be constructed in the front or back of your yard. Front yard rain gardens can be placed to intercept runoff from paved surfaces or from a downspout. Back yard gardens can be situated in any wet area that collects drainage, or an area where you can direct runoff from a downspout. Keep the rain garden away from foundations and let the downspout end about 4 feet from the outside edge of the garden. Gardens should be about 1/3 of the size of the surface area providing the runoff.

## Depth and Soil

The soil in your rain garden should allow fast infiltration of water. You can test the soil by digging a six inch hole where you want your garden to be. Fill the hole with water, and check to see how long it takes the water to drain. If the water drains within six hours you have an ideal spot for a rain garden. Once you have found the proper location, dig the entire area of the garden about 6-12 inches lower than the ground around it.

## Plants

Hardy native species that thrive in our ecosystem are the best choice for a rain garden. Native plants will be tolerant of wet conditions as well as periods of drought. Many rain gardens feature shrubs as well as wild flowers and grasses. You can also choose plants that attract local birds and insects.

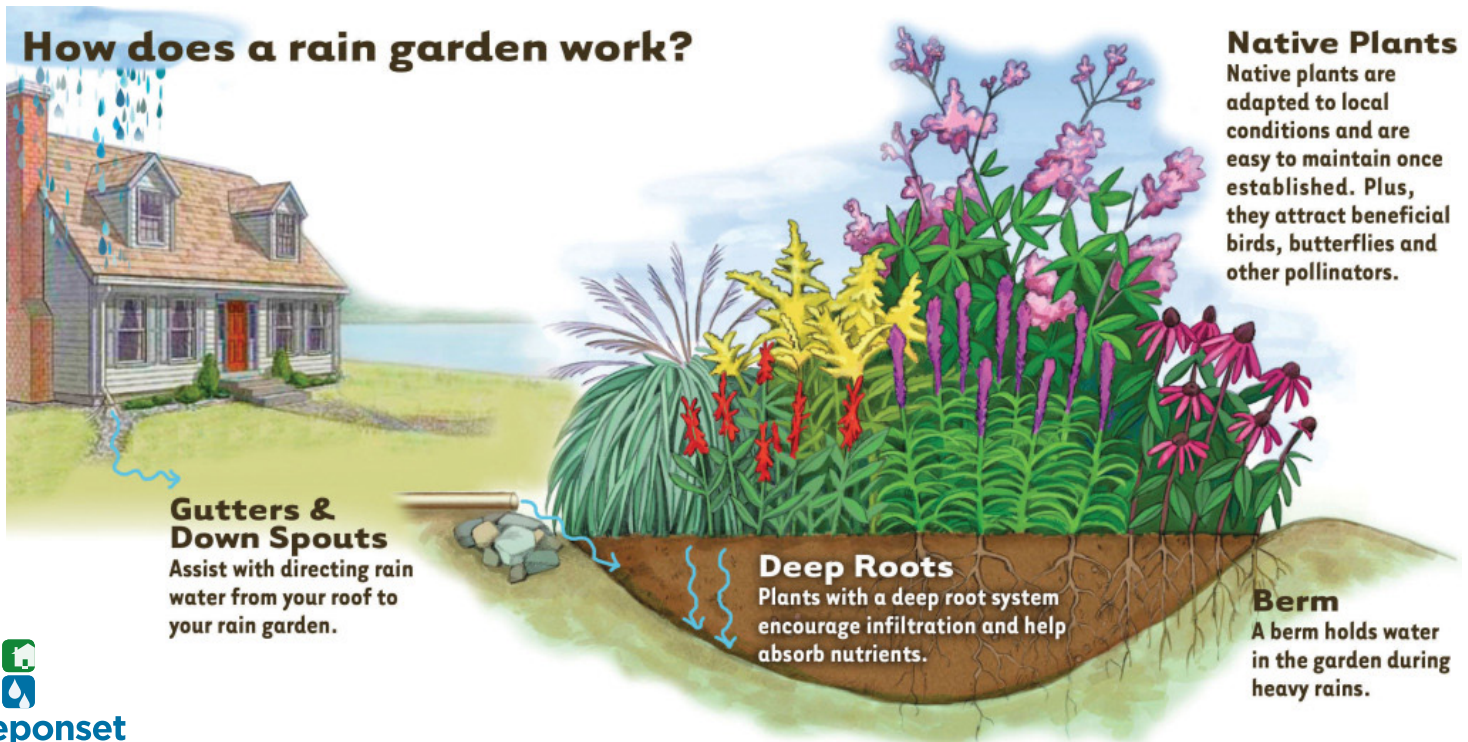
Large rain gardens generally contain at least 15 different species of plants at a density of 1 per square foot. For smaller gardens, a variety of perennials and shrubs makes a good mix. As the rain garden matures, you will need to thin the population of some plants as others grow.

## Maintenance

In the weeks following planting, you should remove weeds until the plants are strong. For the first year your rain garden will most likely require monthly weeding during the growing season. In following years, weed one time per year and replace mulch to retain moisture. Shrubs need to be pruned annually. During extremely dry periods it may also be necessary to water several times per week.

## Tips

- In case of a large rain event, it is important to provide a way for excess water to drain out in order to prevent flooding of your garden.
- To increase the visits of songbirds and butterflies, incorporate berry and nectar-producing plants.
- Leave the dead or dormant plants standing over the winter. Many of the plants will provide seeds and shelter for birds. In the spring, cut back or mow the stalks to allow new shoots to emerge.



## Sunny rain garden plants

The places in your yard that get full sun for six or more hours a day, or partial sun (four to six hours per day) will be good spots for flowering plants. There are hundreds of perennials and shrubs that can be planted in sunny rain gardens. It is a good idea to ask your garden center or home improvement store about sun and soil conditions that are suitable for the plants you intend to put in your garden.

*A few examples of popular native species that do well in sunny rain gardens are listed below.*

### Perennial flowers:

- Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) - orange flowers attract Monarch butterflies
- Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*) – pink or red flowers attract hummingbirds
- New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*) – bright purple flowers in early fall
- Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) – interesting lavender flower spikes in early fall
- Black-Eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) – golden flowers bloom in summer and fall
- Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) – striking pink or white flowers attract butterflies
- Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) – sweet smelling white blooms attract butterflies
- Blue Wild Indigo (*Baptisia australis*) – blue flowers and interesting seed pods



**Turtlehead**

### Grasses:

- Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*) - quick growing, spring wild life cover
- Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) - turns reddish orange in fall



**Sweet Pepperbush**

### Shrubs:

- Sweet Pepperbush (*Clethra alnifolia*) - fragrant flowers attract butterflies
- Red Twig Dogwood (*Cornus Sericea*) – red stems make a winter highlight
- Bridalwreath Spiraea (*Spiraea latifolia*) – cluster of small white flowers

## Shady Rain Gardens

Places in your yard that have less than four hours of sun a day are spots for shade tolerant plants. There are many perennials and shrubs that do well in shady conditions. Ask your garden center or home improvement store about the shade and soil conditions for plants you intend to put in your garden. A few examples of native species that do well in shady rain gardens are noted below.

### Perennials:

- Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) - vibrant red spiky flowers, short-lived
- Blue Flag Iris (*Iris versicolor*) – eye-catching blue-violet flowers
- Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*) – grows to five feet tall with white flowers
- Wild Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra eximia*) – pink flowers early spring
- Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) – red orange flowers attract butterflies
- Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*)



**Bleeding Heart**

### Shrubs:

- Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) - white flowers
- Swamp Rose (*Rosa palustris*) – large white, pink or red flowers
- Highbush Blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) – small white flowers



**Swamp Rose**