

# 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.



*Newly Planted*



Red Admiral butterfly on a Purple Coneflower



Honey bee on Culver's Root



*During a Rain Event*

## 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.



*One Year Later*



Coreopsis



Learn more @ [myfairlakes.com](http://myfairlakes.com)

Left: Prairie Dropseed  
Center: Spiderwort

Right: Prairie Blazingstar

All photos graciously submitted by J. Bertolacini

# Rain Gardens: Step By Step

## 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*

Full Sun (6+ hrs)  
  Part Sun (3-6 hrs)  
  Full Shade (0-3 hrs)

		Prairie Blazingstar <input type="radio"/>		Bloom times may vary.	
		Lanceleaf Coreopsis <input type="radio"/>			
		Purple Coneflower <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Spiderwort <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Canada Anemone <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Nodding Onion <input type="radio"/>		
		Virginia Mountain Mint <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Butterflyweed <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Anise Hyssop <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Marsh Phlox <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Black-Eyed Susan <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>			
		Columbine <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Orange Coneflower <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>		
		Wild Geranium <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Sky Blue Aster <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>		
		Woodland Phlox <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>	Calico Aster <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>		
		Monkey Flower <input type="radio"/>			
		False Rue Anemone <input type="radio"/>	Zig Zag Goldenrod <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/>		
<b>GRASSES/SEDGES</b>					
Common Oak Sedge, Sideoats Gramma Grass, Little Bluestem, Prairie Dropseed, Silky Wild Rye					
<b>May</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>July</b>	<b>Aug.</b>		<b>Sept.</b>