# What is a Rain Garden?

URI Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet – Draft

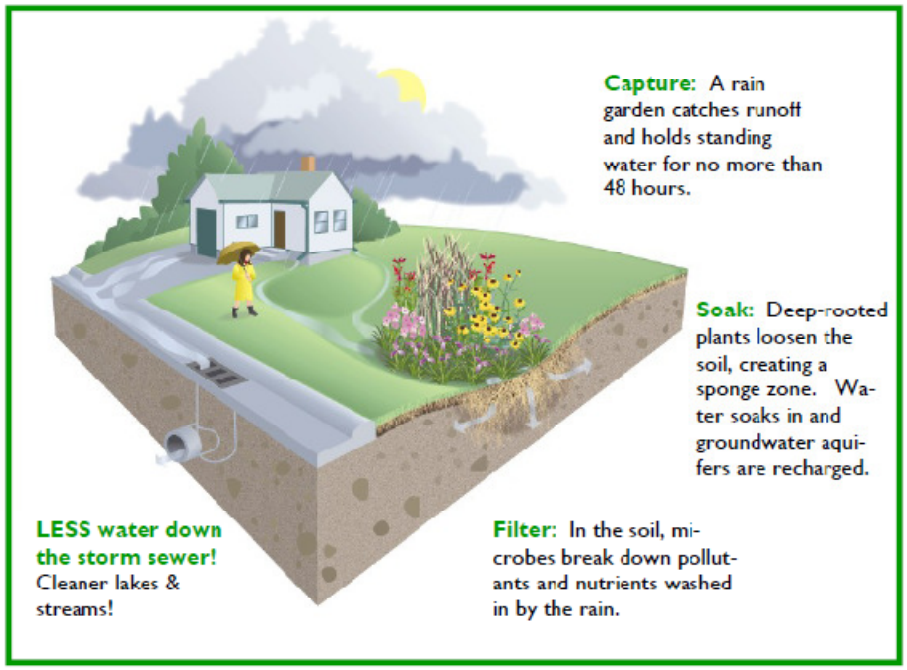
*(Adapted from Maplewood, MN Rain Garden Program)*

**What happens when it rains?**

In planted landscapes rain soaks into the ground. But when rain falls onto roofs, roads, driveways and other hard surfaces, it cannot infiltrate. In most neighborhoods this rainwater runoff is directed into storm sewers. From there it makes its way to a nearby stream, wetland, pond, or lake—untreated!

**What's wrong with sending stormwater down the storm sewer?**

- Stormwater pollutes local waters. Most runoff is not treated. It goes directly into local lakes and streams carrying pollutants like soil, fertilizers, pesticides, oil, soap, litter, organic matter, and pet feces.
- Stormwater runoff in our lakes causes turbid water, sediment buildup and contributes to algae blooms. It can impact health of aquatic plants and animals. Poor water quality in lakes also affects aesthetics and recreation.
- Sending rainwater out of the neighborhood contributes to flooding downstream, swimming and fishing area closures, and threatens water resources.
- Rainwater needs to soak in near where it falls so it can help recharge groundwater aquifers.




*Benefits:*

- Absorbs water from impervious surfaces to reduce flooding
- Helps recharge aquifers
- Provides beneficial wildlife habitat

**What you can do?**

Build a rain garden! A rain garden is a depression in the landscape that is planted like a garden, collects rainwater runoff, and allows it to infiltrate. Rain gardens help soak up rainwater from downspouts, driveways, and sidewalks, while protecting our local waterways. When planted with the right types of plants, rain gardens also attract birds, butterflies and bees.

*The Alternative*

With no rain garden, stormwater drains to our streams and pollutes the watershed.

## *Frequently Asked Questions:*

*(Adapted from Rutgers Cooperative Extension)*

Q: I have a wet spot behind my house, would this be a good place for a rain garden?
A: No, a rain garden is suppose to drain after 24 hours

Q: Can I put plants in my berm?
A: Yes

Q: Will the rain garden be a breeding ground for mosquitoes?
A: No. The gardens are constructed to infiltrate in less than 48 hours after a rain event. Mosquito larvae require 7-12 days of standing water before they emerge.

Q: How do I know if my soul is suitable for a rain garden?
A: Do a percolation or infiltration test. If the infiltration rate is at least one inch per hour, you are good to go!

Q: Do I need to fertilize?
A: You should only fertilize during the initial planting and only according to the county soil test kit results?

Q: Do I need to water?
A: Yes. Frequently during the first year. Especially the first few months after planting (particularly if it is in the middle of summer). There is no need to water until a few days after a storm.

Q: What if some plants die?
A: Younger plants will be more susceptible to drowning if they are immersed in standing water for too long. As a rule of thumb, place the most water tolerant plants near the water's entrance to the garden. Replace dead plants with larger cuttings or a species that you know has survived.

Q: What do I do with my existing grass before installing the rain garden?
A: You have two options:

1. Kill the grass with herbicide beforehand; or
2. Remove the turf as sod pieces. You can reuse it on your berm or another area of your yard.