

Ask a Master Gardener
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Eco Friendly Rain Gardens

Q: Since we have been having so much rain, would this be a good time to think about a rain garden? How is a rain garden different from a bog or wetland garden?

No, a rain garden is not a bog or wetland. A rain garden is a shallow, constructed depression that is planted with deep-rooted native plants and grasses. Other names for this type of feature are bioswale, bioinfiltration pond, and bioretention area. It is located in your landscape to receive runoff from hard surfaces such as roofs, sidewalks, driveways and downspouts to capture rainwater runoff and stop the water from reaching the sewer system. Rain gardens slow down the rush of water from these sources, hold the water for a short period of time and allow it to naturally infiltrate into the ground.

A rain garden that conserves municipal water resources by reducing the need for irrigation can be thought of as a personal water quality system because it filters the runoff from your roof and lawn and recharges the groundwater. Aesthetically, a rain garden is a beautiful way for homeowners, businesses and municipalities to help ease the storm water problems of flooding and pollution. It can create a habitat for birds and beneficial insects and reduce pests and harmful insects. Rain gardens are effective in removing up to 90% of chemicals and up to 80% of sediments from the rainwater runoff. Compared to a conventional lawn, rain gardens allow for 30% more water to soak into the ground. It is actually dry most of the time and holds water only during and following a rainfall event. Because rain gardens will drain within 12-48 hours, they prevent the breeding of mosquitoes.

In the design of a rain garden, the type of alteration to the soil depends on the current soil type, so it is a good idea to obtain a soil test. Additives such as compost and sand increase water infiltration. It should have an area about 20% the size of the roof, patio, or pavement area draining into it. A typical rain garden for a residential home or small building is between 100 and 400 square feet. It should be placed at least 10 feet away from building foundations and should not be located where water collects for an extended period of time. Other considerations include choosing sites that do not have heavy clay soils, are at least 10 feet from basements, and are not placed over utilities, drain fields, septic tanks or wellheads.

Rain gardens created on sandy soils will rarely hold water for more than a few hours. On these sites it is most important to choose plants for their drought tolerance. Rain gardens created on loamy or silty soils could hold water for 2-4 days. If your site ponds water for more than 5 days, you should consider creating a wetland. On these sites, choosing plants tolerant of extended flooding is critical to success. You are not limited to planting just

within the rain garden area. Extending plantings around the area will help the rain garden to blend in with the overall landscape.

For questions about gardening topics contact a Master Gardener volunteer at 770-836-8546, via email at ccmg@uga.edu or visit the UGA Extension office at 900 Newnan Road in Carrollton.