

Building — and planting — rain gardens

Question: I have an area in my flower beds around my house that gets really wet and stays wet because of my downspout flows through there. Everything I put there drowns. Please help.

Answer: This is a problem many of us have, especially here in the Pacific Northwest. Fortunately, you can turn this problem area into an eco-friendly showstopping rain garden. Your rain garden not only benefits your landscape and enhances your home it also benefits your community.

What is a rain garden? A rain garden controls and filters runoff. It traps water in a shallow depression and allows it to soak into the ground and filter out pollutants. A major benefit of a rain garden for communities is that it controls runoff, preventing flash flooding. Since a rain garden traps and filters runoff, it prevents the pollutants normally found in runoff from being washed into our rivers, lakes, streams and into our sewage treatment plants.

To construct a rain garden, dig a basin for the water, starting at the uphill side. The basin should be 6 to 8 inches deep and flat on the bottom. Use the dirt you



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have removed to make the basin to mound into berms around the basin. Slope the berms gently, compact them and cover with plants, grass or mulch to prevent erosion.

Your downspout must run down and away from the foundation of your house and direct the water into the basin. There are several options for this. The simplest is to extend your downspout and point it toward your basin. Remember, your rain garden is in a lower spot so the water will flow down to it. If you prefer the pipe on the ground not to be exposed, you may dig a trench and use a length of PVC pipe placed underground from the downspout to the basin. A more decorative solution is to line a shallow trench with gravel or river rock, forming a dry stream bed from the downspout to your basin.

If needed, now is the time to add any amendments to the soil.

For the best results use

plants that are native to your area. They are used to our weather conditions and thrive in them. You may add non-native plants if they like the same conditions.

Ideal plants for rain gardens include, but are not limited to Iris sibirica, Aster, Black chokeberry, Veronica spicata, Goldenrod, Coneflower, and Compact red-twig dogwood.

Maintaining your rain garden is much like maintaining any other garden. Mulch it to block weed growth, hold in moisture and prevent erosion. Do not use large bark chips since they float away. Adding compost also helps retain moisture and adds needed nutrients. Periodically check the berms for any damage and repair as needed.

Weeding is extremely important in the first two years; ensure that the roots are completely removed. After the first two years of proper weeding,



PHOTO COURTESY OF PIXABAY

A rain garden controls and filters runoff, trapping water and allowing it to soak into the ground without flash flooding.

you will be rewarded with beautiful mature plants that will block out the weeds themselves and require very little weeding by you.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardeners Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-236-3052, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave.,

Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who

help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.