

KPOV – *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good at It
“Building a Rain Garden”
October 9, 2018

Rain gardens are a great way to add beautiful landscaping to your yard and protect our urban storm water system and streams. A rain garden is a sunken landscaped area in the yard that captures runoff from a roof, driveway, or other watertight surface. The rain garden allows water to soak into the ground. Why are rain gardens so important? When the Pacific Northwest was covered with forests, rainfall slowly dripped through branches and vegetation, seeped through duff, and sank into underground aquifers or flowed slowly to nearby streams. But now, rainfall that lands on hard surfaces drains to streams or other local waterways via the storm water system. Water that once took days, weeks or months to reach a stream now gets there in a matter of minutes. The result? Too much water all at once. As a large pulse of fast-moving water flows down the stream system, it scours and erodes the streambed, moving gravel downstream and degrading fish habitat. The runoff picks up pollutants like fertilizers, pet wastes, and oil from parking lots, and in some places, carries it straight to our streams. Rain gardens help us restore the natural hydrology and water quality that is critical to ensure healthy streams and waterways.

Building a rain garden is a lot like putting in any other kind of landscaping on your property. You'll want to pick plants that you like and locate it in a spot that fits with the rest of your landscaping. Because a rain garden is designed to absorb water, it must be located in an area with good drainage. Poor draining soils can lead to standing water. Plan for water overflows when considering locations for the garden. Make sure that the outlet of the rain garden overflows to an area that can handle the water like a storm water system or natural area. Also, make sure that the rain garden overflow won't dump into your neighbor's yard or foundation or, for that matter, yours. Decide what surfaces you'd like to drain into your garden and locate the rain garden near these to avoid excessive digging or curved drainage lines. Use gravity! Place a garden so the drainage flows downhill. And by all means, locate your rain garden within view of a window, deck or patio where you can watch wildlife and the foliage unfold.

Contact the local community department before construction. The location and design may need a permit or inspection. Map out your property showing structures, utilities, driveways and sidewalks and include the proposed rain garden. Mapping before you build will ensure you think through potential challenges for any location you are considering for a rain garden.

In a rain garden the plants and soil work together. The plant roots and soil organisms build soil structure creating channels and pores to soak up and filter water and allow nutrients and oxygen to flow in to support an abundance of life. Rain gardens generally have three planting zones characterized by moisture. For the bottom of your rain garden choose plants that can tolerate wetter conditions. For the slope, look for plants that can tolerate occasional standing water. And for the top look for plants that prefer drier conditions.

Native plants and hardy cultivars are excellent choices so that a regular watering schedule is not necessary. Plants should be selected according to how much sun your rain garden will receive- full sun, part sun, or shade.

Rain gardens, just like any garden area, need maintenance to perform well and look good. Mulching, watering, fertilizing, weeding, and pruning a well-designed rain garden is a must to keep your rain garden gorgeous for many years to come.

Look for more information on rain gardens and other gardening topics on our website at www.gocomga.com and click the KPOV tab on the orange bar. Thanks for listening to “Gardening- Get Good at It!” on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

Oregon Rain Garden Guide

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/node/81731>

Rain Gardens

<https://extension.wsu.edu/raingarden/>

How to Build a Rain Garden

<https://extension.wsu.edu/raingarden/homeowner-resources/>

Rain Gardens

<http://nemo.uconn.edu/raingardens/>

Rain Gardens- The Basics

<https://extension.psu.edu/rain-gardens-the-basics>