

# What is a Rain Garden?



Vietnam Memorial Park - Cohoes

Rain gardens are where form meets function and the gutter meets the ground. Simply put, rain gardens are gardens that are specifically designed to soak up rain water, mainly from roofs, but also from driveways and patios. Rain gardens may look like regular flower gardens, but they are actually much more. When it rains, a rain garden fills with a few inches of water that then slowly filters into the ground rather than running off to the storm drains. Compared to a patch of lawn, rain gardens allow about 30% more water to soak into the ground. They also add beauty to neighborhoods and provide wildlife habitat.



Shaker Heritage Site

## Plan

### Choosing a Spot

Rain gardens can be designed to catch water from a roof or even a driveway. When choosing a location for your garden, pick an area that is relatively flat or has a slight depression. Keep the following considerations in mind:



Shaker Heritage Site - Colonie

- Rain gardens are **NOT** a solution to wet areas! The garden must have good drainage so that water can soak in within 24 hours after a rainfall. This will also prevent your garden from becoming a mosquito haven.
- The garden should be at least ten feet away from the house. Use a gutter extension or build a swale to direct rainwater from roof gutter or driveway to garden.
- The garden should receive full or partial sunlight.
- Avoid the area over a septic system.
- The garden must include an overflow outlet that will transport excess rainfall to a proper location (not your neighbor's lawn!)

## Prepare

### How Big?

The size of your garden will depend upon three main factors:

1. *The size of the drainage area*
2. *The type of soils on the site*
3. *The depth of the garden*

A typical residential rain garden ranges from 100 to 300 square feet. For advice on calculating the dimensions of your garden, call the Cornell Cooperative Extension phone number on the back of this brochure.

### Ready to Dig?

- Use a hose or string to outline the shape of your garden.
- On a slope, more digging will be required on the uphill side. Use extra soil to build a berm on the downhill side.
- The bottom of the garden must be flat and level. It should look like a saucer, not like a bowl.
- Don't forget to make an overflow for heavy rain events!



Call before you dig  
**Dig Safe NY**  
(1-800-962-7962)  
to locate any underground utility lines!

## Plant



Vietnam Memorial Park - Cohoes

### Plant Selection

Choose plants that have a variety of heights, textures, and bloom times. Native perennial plants are recommended. It is important to select plants that can tolerate both wet and dry conditions, and that are suited to the sun/shade exposure of your garden. Examples include: Blue Flag Iris, Black-eyed Susan, Blazing Star, and Green-headed Coneflower.

**Tip:** Dig each hole **twice the width of the plant rootball. The hole should be deep enough so that the top of the plant's rootball is level with the ground.**





# Garden for Cleaner Water

## What is stormwater runoff?

Stormwater runoff is the water that runs over and off the land during a rainstorm or snowmelt, rather than soaking in.



## What's the problem?

As stormwater runs over streets, parking lots, and lawns it can pick up and carry many kinds of materials that then get washed into nearby streams and lakes. This leads to stormwater pollution!



## Where do these pollutants come from?

Stormwater picks up contaminants that come from these sources and more:

- Fertilizers
- Pesticides
- Bacteria from pet waste
- Eroded soil
- Road salt
- Grass clippings
- Litter
- Petroleum products

Rain gardens capture and filter stormwater



*Rain gardens are a beautiful and beneficial addition to any landscape. By capturing rain water, they help to cleanse and reduce stormwater pollution and protect local streams, lakes, rivers and watersheds.*



## Plant a Rain Garden of Your Own!

- Add beauty & interest to your yard
- Contribute to cleaner water
- Increase groundwater recharge
- Provide habitat for butterflies & wildlife

Visit any of the following sites to see one of Albany County's Demonstration Rain Gardens:

**Elm Avenue Park - Bethlehem**

**Vietnam Memorial Park - Cohoes**

**Shaker Heritage Site - Colonie**

**William Rice Jr. Extension Center - Voorheesville**

For more information about rain gardens, or how to design and construct one for your own yard, contact:

**Cornell Cooperative Extension Albany County**

518-765-3500 <http://www.ccealbany.com>

**Albany County Soil & Water Conservation District**

518-765-7923 <http://www.albanycounty.com/swcd>

**Albany County Stormwater Coordinator**

518-447-5645 <http://www.albanycounty.com/edcp/swp.asp>

Or Visit:

<http://www.sustainability.uconn.edu/pdf/raingardenbroch.pdf>

*Project collaborators:*

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*Stormwater Coalition of Albany County*

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# An Introduction to Rain Gardens



Elm Avenue Park - Bethlehem

## Albany County Demonstration Rain Gardens

Gardens constructed by Cornell Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners and Staff, Albany County Soil and Water Conservation District Staff and Municipality Staff.

These rain gardens capture runoff from adjacent parking lots, roofs and other impervious surfaces, helping to prevent stormwater from polluting the waters of Albany County.