

Catch It Where It Falls



Using Rain Gardens to Control Stormwater Runoff

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For more information about rain gardens, contact the Alabama Coastal Foundation at (251) 990-6002 or visit www.joinacf.org



Wolf Bay Watershed
Watch



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Cover photos: Rain Garden at the home of Stan & Jesse Mahoney, Foley, AL

What is a Rain Garden?



Rain gardens catch run off from hard surfaces before the water and any pollutants it carries makes its way to our waterways.

A rain garden is a garden that performs a special function to help protect our waters. Rain gardens are essentially bowls that collect and hold the water that runs off of impervious surfaces (roofs, driveways, etc.). By capturing storm water run off and allowing it to seep slowly into the ground, rain gardens protect nearby water bodies by absorbing and trapping pollutants and sediment before they make their way into our rivers and bays. Some of these pollutants are absorbed by the plants and used, while others are broken down by bacteria and made harmless.

Rain gardens are suitable for any land use situation: residential, commercial or industrial. They can be designed to attract birds, butterflies and other wild life. Rain gardens are a cost-efficient way to landscape; they don't need to be fertilized or sprayed with pesticide— all they need is weeding and mulching. Planting a rain garden may seem like a small task, but by catching rain where it falls, you not only are creating a beautiful space for you and wildlife to enjoy, but you are also helping to protect the streams, rivers, lakes and bays in South Alabama.

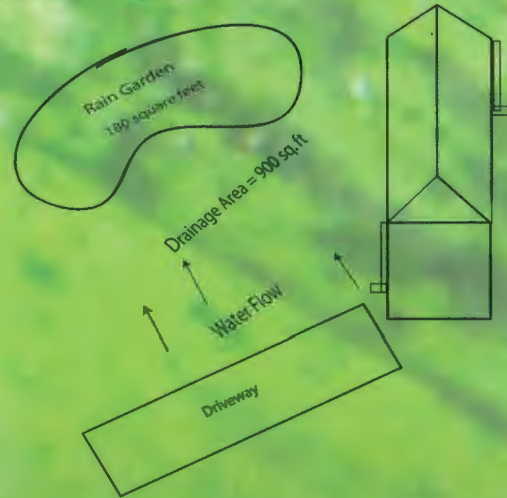
Choose a Location for Your Rain Garden

The best spot for a new rain garden is in a low-lying area where water flows naturally. Placing your garden near a hard surface such as a sidewalk or patio is an especially good location. They can also be built near gutter downspouts- just be sure to site your garden at least 10 feet from your home's foundation. Rain gardens should never be placed over a septic system.

Before you start digging, determine your soil type. If you have soil with a lot of clay, your rain garden should be about 60% of the drainage area. If your soil is very sandy, your garden should be about 20% of the drainage area. If you have poor soil conditions, consider adding organic matter to your soil.

After you have located the perfect spot for your garden, you need to figure out the size and shape of your garden- anything goes as long as the size and shape you choose can accommodate the amount of water that will be draining into the garden.

Example: The drainage area in the illustration below equals 900 square feet. If the soil where the garden will be located is generally sandy, then the square footage of the garden will need to be approximately 140 square feet, or 20% of the drainage area.



Rain Garden Design

1. Calculate the necessary size for the garden by estimating the square footage of your drainage area. (length x width). If your drainage area includes your roof, follow this example:

The area of your roof is 1200 square feet with 2 downspouts, one of which will connect to your garden. Divide the square footage by the number of downspouts (1200/2=600). Then multiply your answer by .2 (for sandy soil) (600x.2=120 square feet of garden needed).

2. Use a rope to lay out your garden area with the longest side facing the direction the water will be coming from.



3. Choose plants suitable for a rain garden. Native plants are best to use, as they are used to our climate and naturally resistant to pesky critters.

4. Start digging. The slope of your lawn will determine how deep your rain garden should be. If your lawn is flat, 3-4 inches is an ideal depth. The bottom of your garden bed should be as level as possible. Use any extra dirt to create a berm on the downhill side.

5. Maintain. Rain gardens require mulching and weeding and little else! You may need to water your garden until it is established if there is little rain.

Create Your Rain Garden

Use these designs to get you started creating your rain garden. These plants are well-suited to our climate and require little maintenance once they are established.

