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What is a Rain Garden?

By definition, a rain garden is a shallow depression that is planted with deep-rooted native plants and grasses. The garden should be positioned near a runoff source like a downspout, driveway or sump pump to capture rainwater runoff and stop the water from reaching the sewer system.

But rain gardens are much more than their physical and biological structure.

By installing a rain garden on you property or even using the principles of a rain garden in your landscaping, you can greatly increase your contribution to preserving clean rainwater, creating habitat and preventing local flooding and water pollution.

Preserving clean rainwater

On the next rainy day look out the window or even better, get an umbrella and go outside and look at the movement of the rainwater that falls on your property. Look at the flow of the water, where it pools and where it flows off your property to the sewer or local rivers.

By collecting that clean rainwater in your rain garden's shallow depression, you will make a contribution to preserving and conserving rainwater. Instead of sending clean rainwater to the sewer the water can then be soaked into the ground and possibly even help to recharge local groundwater systems.

Diverting large quantities of stormwater after our ever larger rainfalls to a safe location and not into your basement can help to reduce potential home flooding.

If your area encounters a dry or drought situation your garden will support itself. The deep roots of the plants will reach down toward the water in the soil that is not near the surface.

Creating habitat

One of the three requirements for a properly installed rain garden is the use of deep-rooted plants that are native to your area. Native plants are adapted to the local soil, climate and wildlife. They often are sturdy, colorful to attract insects to their nectar

and birds to their seeds. But planting native plants in any form you will help to improve the survival of bees, butterflies and local and migrating birds.

By working to increase these beneficial insects and birds you can also naturally eliminate insect pests such as mosquitoes.

When it comes to mosquito control rain garden are a natural and proven way to remove standing water and reduce mosquito breeding areas. By moving water downward into the ground through the deep roots of native plants, the plant's uptake of water and their transpiration of the water.

Prevent local flooding and pollution

Rain gardens are a form of "bioretention" system. You can see large version of these systems in the parking lots of nature centers and state parks. These human-made systems temporarily store rainwater and runoff and clean the water of hydrocarbons, oil, heavy metals, phosphorus, fertilizers and other pollutants that would normally find their way to the sewer and perhaps our rivers and waterways.

Localized rain gardens do much the same thing. Relatively clean rainwater might flow across your roof, driveway or chemically treated lawn and pick up pollutants. Instead of moving these pollutants to the street the rain garden will intercept and naturally clean and infiltrate the water. In some area this reduces large quantities of water and contaminants from reaching the treatment plant and in others locals it prevents stormwater from running directly into rivers and streams.

Other benefits include:

Reduce or eliminate the need to water with municipal water

Reduce garden maintenance

Increase garden enjoyment

Sustainability and urban enhancement

Enhance sidewalk appeal