

# Building a Rain Garden



**Location:** Your rain garden can be constructed in the front or back of your yard. Front yard rain gardens can be placed to intercept runoff from paved surfaces or from a downspout. Back yard gardens can be situated in any wet area that collects drainage or an area where you can direct runoff from a downspout.

Keep the rain garden away from foundations and let the downspout end about 4 feet from the outside edge of the garden. Your garden should be about 1/3 of the size of the surface area providing the runoff.

**Depth and Soil:** You should make a depression 6 to 18 inches deep throughout the area of the garden. The soil in your rain garden should be a mix that will allow fast infiltration of water. This can be done using a mixture of about 50% sand or stone aggregate, 30% compost and 20% topsoil. This mixture will allow excellent root growth and recharge of water.

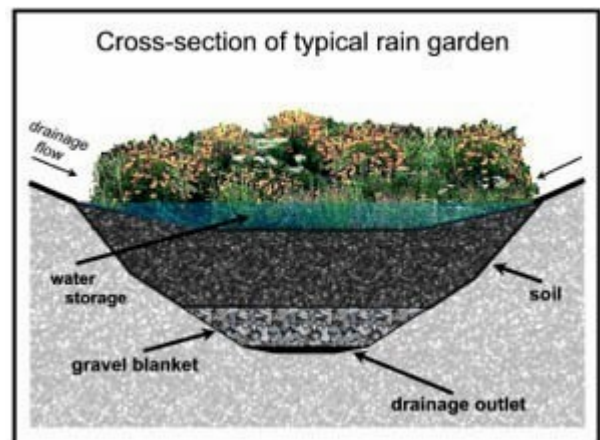
**Plants:** Hardy native species that thrive in our ecosystem are the best choice for your rain garden. Native plants will be tolerant of wet conditions as well as periods of drought. Many rain gardens feature shrubs as well as wild flowers and grasses. You can also choose plants that attract local birds and insects.

Large rain gardens generally contain at least 15 different species of plants at a density of 1 per square foot. For smaller gardens, a variety of perennials and shrubs makes a good mix. As the rain garden matures, you will need to thin the population of some plants as others grow.

**Maintenance:** In the weeks following planting, you should remove weeds until the plants are strong. For the first year your rain garden will most likely require monthly weeding during the growing season. In following years, weed one time per year and replace mulch to retain moisture. Shrubs need to be pruned annually. During extremely dry periods it may also be necessary to water several times per week.

## **Tips:**

- You can use peat moss in addition to compost to increase moisture retention.
- In case of a large rain event, it is important to provide a way for excess water to drain out in order to prevent flooding of your garden.
- To increase the visits of songbirds and butterflies, incorporate berry and nectar-producing plants.
- Leave the dead or dormant plants standing over the winter. Many of the plants will provide seeds and shelter for birds. In the spring, cut back or mow the stalks to allow new shoots to emerge.



## Rain Garden Plant List

(this is just a partial list, also see <http://www.mass.gov/dfwele/river/rivnativesp.htm> for a list of plants suitable for riparian areas)



### ***Plants for Sun:***

|                   |                                   |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Marsh Milkweed    | ( <i>Asclepias incarnata</i> )    |
| New England Aster | ( <i>Aster novae-angliae</i> )    |
| Marsh Marigold    | ( <i>Caltha palustris</i> )       |
| Tussock Sedge     | ( <i>Carex stricta</i> )          |
| Turtlehead        | ( <i>Chelone glabra</i> )         |
| Joe Pye Weed      | ( <i>Eupatorium maculatum</i> )   |
| Boneset           | ( <i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i> ) |
| Butterfly weed    | ( <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i> )     |
| Bee Balm          | ( <i>Monarda didyma</i> )         |

### ***Plants for Shade:***

|                 |                                      |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|
| Cardinal Flower | ( <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i> )        |
| Foam flower     | ( <i>Tiarella cordifolia</i> )       |
| Bleeding heart  | ( <i>Dicentra eximia</i> )           |
| Solomon's seal  | ( <i>Polygonatum falcatum</i> )      |
| Columbine       | ( <i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> )      |
| Royal Fern      | ( <i>Osumunda regalis</i> )          |
| Maidenhair Fern | ( <i>Adiantum pedatum</i> )          |
| Ostrich Fern    | ( <i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i> ) |
| Sensitive Fern  | ( <i>Onoclea sensibilis</i> )        |



### ***Shrubs:***

|                     |                                 |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| Red Twig Dogwood    | ( <i>Cornus Sericea</i> )       |
| High Bush Blueberry | ( <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i> ) |
| Inkberry            | ( <i>Ilex glabra compacta</i> ) |
| Winterberry         | ( <i>Ilex verticillata</i> )    |
| Pussy Willow        | ( <i>Salix caprea</i> )         |
| High Bush Cranberry | ( <i>Viburnum trilobum</i> )    |
| Black Elderberry    | ( <i>Sambucus canadensis</i> )  |

