

Rain Gardens Provide Bountiful Eco Benefits

“It’s very much a replication of a kind of wetland,” explains Heidi Schaffer, Antrim County Soil Erosion Officer. “The idea is to filter water before it reaches a lake or stream with a new technique called a rain garden.”



Schaffer, who works closely with excavators and builders when issuing soil erosion permits, says she’s excited to see more and more rain gardens being constructed in Antrim County and especially in the Chain of Lakes area. “The key is, they control stormwater, retain it, then let it filter directly into the ground.” This helps protect the region’s vital water quality and provides homeowners a way to beautify their property.

Schaffer says rain gardens are growing quickly in popularity. “They can be symmetrical or wild depending on the desires of the property owner. They act as a beautiful detention basin and should be placed in a strategic place to collect stormwater runoff before it drains to our lakes or rivers.”

Schaffer says the ideal depth is about six inches. “Rain gardens not only help filter stormwater runoff, they also are an ideal solution to soil erosion problems and keep sediment from flowing into our waterways.”

Sedimentation is a major problem, as it covers natural areas on river and lake bottoms that provide fish habitat and spawning areas.

Although most rain gardens are being constructed by private property owners, Schaffer praised the Village of Elk Rapids for incorporating a large rain garden into a street improvement project on the east side of the village. “We would love to see more villages and townships using rain gardens as a technique to filter stormwater.” She also praised a new rain garden being designed near downtown Alden.

Lake experts say controlling the flow of stormwater into area lakes and streams is an important part of protecting water quality. A rain garden is a natural way to help solve these stormwater problems, helps recharge ground water, and creates habitat for birds, butterflies and wildlife.

“The best way to plant a rain garden is with native species because they do not require fertilizers,” Schaffer explains. “Native wildflowers, ferns, sedges, and small bushes and trees work very well and require almost no maintenance and no fertilizers.”

“This is an easy and fun way for shoreline property owners to do their part in helping to maintain our water quality,” Schaffer says.