

Going Green with Rain Gardens

An Exciting Idea Begins to Grow

With protecting water quality listed as a top priority for Antrim County's Chain of Lakes region, the popularity of rain gardens from Six Mile Lake to Lake Skegemog is one of the fastest growing areas of interest for home landscaping.



Rain gardens, technically called bioretention systems, were first conceived by stormwater experts in the early 1990s. They were invented as a way of imitating the natural filtering of stormwater before it reaches a lake or a stream.

Stormwater runoff often carries fertilizers and other pollutants with it as it flows into the nearest waterway.

A rain garden is a natural depression in the ground designed to absorb rainwater runoff from impervious surfaces such as roads, driveways, walkways, roofs and compacted lawn areas. The ideal depth is about four to six inches deep with a flat bottom. Rain gardens are designed to capture and hold storm runoff, allowing it to soak directly into the ground.

Native plants are recommended for rain gardens because they do not require fertilizers and are adapted to northern Michigan's climate. Wildflowers, sedges, rushes, ferns, shrubs and small trees can be planted. Wetland-loving wildflowers such as Joe Pye Weed, Marsh Marigold and Blue Flag Iris are recommended.

Rain gardens should be strategically located to intercept stormwater runoff. Studies have shown that up to 70 percent of pollution in rivers, lakes and streams is carried there by stormwater. This type of pollution causes increased algae growth and destroys fish habitat.

Some of the other advantages of rain gardens include:

- Using little or no pesticides
- Maintenance similar to perennial gardens
- No need for watering after established
- Attracting beautiful birds, butterflies and wildlife

The best way to get started building your own rain garden is to contact a local nursery or browse the Internet; www.raingardens.org is a helpful web site. With the popularity of rain gardens increasing, the amount of information available is plentiful.