

Build Your Own Rain Garden

Plant Selection & Planting Schemes

A Rain Garden is a shallow depression that collects rain water from roofs, driveways, sidewalks or lawns, cleans it by dissipating the water through soil and plants, and allows it to soak into the ground rather than run off.

Determine the amount of water and sunlight your garden will receive

The kinds of plants you choose for your Rain Garden will depend on the site conditions in your yard. Rain Gardens can be planted in either sun or shade; select plants that will tolerate the light conditions of your Rain Garden site. Some species will tolerate both full sun and full shade, while others will only thrive in one condition or the other. Consult the back of this sheet for sunny and shady species suggestions.

The wetness of the rain garden is also an important factor to consider. Rain Gardens will have periods when they are dry and periods when they are wet. The lowest area will remain wet longer than the higher areas. Choose plants based on their wetness tolerance and place them in the garden accordingly. See the back of the Rain Garden brochure for information on plant species' water tolerance.

You can use perennials, grasses, trees and shrubs in Rain Gardens, so there are lots of plant choices. Choose plants that you find appealing and will enjoy having in your yard. Consider the style of your existing landscape plantings when selecting plants to allow your Rain Garden to blend into the rest of your yard.

Be sure to include sedges and grasses in your garden. These not only give structure to the garden when the flowering plants are not in bloom, but their fibrous roots continually die, adding organic matter to the soil and leaving behind root channels that increase infiltration. Grasses also help support the flowering plants as they grow. Consider the mature height of the plants when designing your garden. Many native species grow quite tall.

Select a few key species and plant multiples of those plants, rather than having one plant of many different species in your garden. Group your plants for best effect and repeat groupings throughout the garden to create a more structured look.

Native vs. Exotic

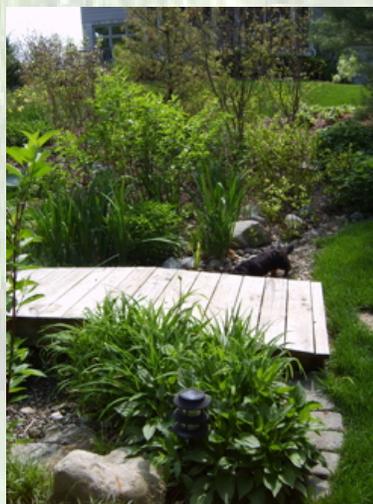
Rain Garden plants should be able to withstand both wet and dry soil conditions. Native plants are perfect for Rain Gardens because they are already adapted to the extremes in temperature and precipitation we can experience in Indiana. Native plants, once established, do not require supplemental water except in extreme drought conditions. They also do not need pesticides or fertilizers. In addition, the root systems of established native plants grow very deep and help to improve infiltration, water retention, and drainage of the garden over time. All of these features of native plants help improve water quality, which is one of the main reasons to build a Rain Garden.

Native plants also provide habitat for our local wildlife. When you plant a Rain Garden with natives, you will invite song birds, butterflies, and other native animal and insect species to your yard, improving biodiversity and the health of our environment.

You can use exotic species, but keep in mind that native plants are the work horses in rain gardens. Exotic species will also require more attention as weather conditions fluctuate.

Rain Gardens can be incorporated into any landscape style

Once you have determined the location and size of your Rain Garden, decide on a shape that fits into your



landscape and is appealing to you. Any shape will work as long as the side of the garden downstream from the water source is bermed to allow the runoff to collect in the garden. Use a garden hose or extension cord to layout the shape of the garden, adjusting the shape as needed to meet the size required to capture your runoff.

Rain Gardens may be perceived as unkempt in comparison to more manicured landscape plans.

Consider adding a bird bath, trellis, or bench in the drier areas of the garden to give the impression of an intended planting.



Plant Selection & Planting Schemes (cont.)

Plants for partly shady Rain Gardens

Sneezeweed (<i>Helenium autumnale</i>)	Burr Sedge (<i>Carex grayii</i>)
Smooth Penstemon (<i>Penstemon calycosus</i>)	Palm Sedge (<i>Carex muskingumensis</i>)
Foxglove Penstemon (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)	Golden Alexanders (<i>Zizia aurea</i>)
Wrinkled Goldenrod (<i>Solidago rugosa</i>)	Golden Ragwort (<i>Senecio aureus</i>)
Culver's Root (<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>)	Blue Flag Iris (<i>Iris virginica shrevei</i>)
Cardinal Flower (<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>)	Monkey Flower (<i>Mimulus ringens</i>)
Great Blue Lobelia (<i>Lobelia siphilitica</i>)	Wild Columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)
Brome Hummock Sedge (<i>Carex bromoides</i>)	Bottle Gentian (<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>)

Plants for bird and butterfly Rain Gardens

Stiff Goldenrod (<i>Solidago rugosa</i>)	Golden Alexanders (<i>Zizia aurea</i>)
New England Aster (<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>)	Smooth Aster (<i>Aster laevis</i>)
Smooth Penstemon (<i>Penstemon calycosus</i>)	Common Milkweed (<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>)
Mountain Mint (<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i>)	Cardinal Flower (<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>)
Purple Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>)	Blue Flag Iris (<i>Iris virginica shrevei</i>)
Dense Blazing Star (<i>Liatris spicata</i>)	Switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)
Prairie Dropseed (<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>)	
Yellow Fox Sedge (<i>Carex annectans xanthocarpa</i>)	
Showy Black-Eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia fulgida speciosa</i>)	

Plants for low-stature Rain Gardens (1-3 feet tall)

Yellow Fox Sedge (<i>Carex annectans xanthocarpa</i>)	Meadow Sedge (<i>Carex granularis</i>)
Brome Hummock Sedge (<i>Carex bromoides</i>)	Burr Sedge (<i>Carex grayii</i>)
Palm Sedge (<i>Carex muskingumensis</i>)	Frank's Sedge (<i>Carex frankii</i>)
Tufted Hair Grass (<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>)	Blue Flag Iris (<i>Iris virginica shrevei</i>)
Prairie Dropseed (<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>)	Bottle Gentian (<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>)
Smooth Penstemon (<i>Penstemon calycosus</i>)	Golden Ragwort (<i>Senecio aureus</i>)
Foxglove Penstemon (<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>)	Golden Alexanders (<i>Zizia aurea</i>)
Mountain Mint (<i>Pycnanthemum virginianum</i>)	
Showy Black-Eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia fulgida speciosa</i>)	

Trees and Shrubs

Buttonbush (<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>)	River Birch (<i>Betula nigra</i>)
Red-Osier Dogwood (<i>Cornus sericea</i>)	Bald Cypress (<i>Taxodium distichum</i>)
Spicebush (<i>Lindera benzoin</i>)	Bur Oak (<i>Quercus macrocarpa</i>)
Downy Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier arborea</i>)	Pin Oak (<i>Quercus palustris</i>)

Plant lowest area with species that can tolerate being wet for 24-48 hours.

Plant higher areas with species that can tolerate being wet for less than 24 hours.

Important: Do not transplant native plants from the wild to your yard or plants from your yard into wild areas, as this may introduce unwanted or invasive species.

More information on plant characteristics, such as height and color, can be found at the websites listed below.

Sources of Native Plants & Information

Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society
<http://www.inpaws.org>

Indiana Wildlife Federation
<http://www.indianawildlife.org>

JFNew <http://www.JFNew.com>

Spence Restoration Nursery (wholesale only)
<http://www.spencenursery.com>

Contact your local Soil & Water Conservation District for additional information.



Plants to Avoid

These plants are considered invasive species.

- Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- Reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)
- Common reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*, *R. frangula*)
- Cattails (*Typha angustifolia*, *T. latifolia*)

Photo credit:
 Robert H. Mohlenbrock. USDA SCS. 1989. *Midwest wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species*. Midwest National Technical Center, Lincoln. Courtesy of USDA-NRCS Wetland Science Institute.

