What is a rain garden?

Rain Gardens are just what they sound like—gardens that soak up rain water, mainly from your roof, but also from your driveway and lawn. They are landscaped areas planted to wild flowers and other native vegetation to replace areas of lawn. The gardens fill with a few inches of water and allow the water to slowly filter into the ground rather than running off to storm drains. Compared to a patch of conventional lawn, a rain garden allows about 30 to 40% more water to soak into the ground.

Holding back the runoff helps prevent pollutants such as fertilizers from washing off your yard, into storm sewers, and eventually into nearby streams and lakes. By reducing the amount of water that enters the local storm drain systems, rain gardens can also reduce the chances for local flooding, as well as bank and shoreline damage where storm drains empty into streams and lakes.

People in many parts of the country are starting to build rain gardens in their yards and promoting their use in other locations, such as neighborhood parks. You can help in your own yard by simply building one or more rain gardens to collect runoff from your roof. Rain water can be sometimes collected from your drive way or lawn by locating a rain garden in a low spot where the water naturally drains

Consider a rain garden for your yard

Rain gardens can be your personal contribution to cleaner water, healthier fish and wildlife populations, and a greater improved environment for your family and community. Each rain garden may seem small, but collectively they produce substantial neighborhood and regional environmental benefits. Rain gardens can work for us in several ways:

>Increasing the amount of water filtering into the ground, which recharges ground water and helps reduce the amount of pollutants washing off to lakes and streams;
>Help sustain adequate flows in streams during dry spells;
>Providing valuable wildlife habitat;
> Enhancing the beauty of your yard and the neighborhood;
>Helping protect communities from flooding and draining problems;
>Help protect streams and lakes from damaging flows and reducing erosion of the streambanks and lakeshores;
>Reducing the need for costly municipal storm water treatment structures.

Tips for a productive rain garden

>Keep in mind that a rain garden is a "garden" not a prairie. The focus is on flowers, although some grasses can be used.

>When planting the rain garden, ask some friends to help. A few people helping for an hour can be fun for all and will allow you to get the planting done in a couple hours.

>In the weeks after planting, you may want to hoe dandelions and other weeds until the mature garden plants crowd them out.

>As the rain garden matures, you will need to thin the population of some plants to allow others to grow.

>Leave the dead or dormant plants standing over the winter. Many of the plants will provide seed and shelter for birds. In spring cut back or mow the stalks to allow new shoots to emerge.

> Installation of a rain garden is slightly more work than a comparable area of lawn, but maintenance is low once the plants mature.

Construction Site Basics:

1.Limit the extent and duration of land disturbance.

2. Divert incoming flows and impede internal flows.

3. Install sediment capturing devices to retain sediment picked up on the project site.

Helpful websites:

Stormwater Manager's Resource Center
www.stormwatercenter.net

Rain Gardens
www.raingardennetwork.com

Watershed Protection
www.cwp.org

Riverwatch
www.in.gov/dnr/riverwatch

Drain Marking
www.in.gov/dnr/stormdrain