Resolving Problem Areas Through Rain Gardens

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Do you enjoy watching the rain? It can be quite soothing. Have you ever watched where the rain goes? Does it stay on your property or flow right off? Do you have a septic system and your washing machine water flows out to the yard like my mom's? Rain gardens are an inexpensive way to remedy a flow problem, as well as improve water quality and enhance the beauty of your yard.

Stormwater runoff often picks up pollutants such as fertilizer, pesticides, sediment, motor oil, and yard waste from your yard, roof, and driveway. Through storm drains and streets, these pollutants flow into our ponds, creeks, and springs, leading to our drinking water in the aquifer. Rain gardens intersect the runoff and filter the pollutants.

Similar to swales and stormwater retention ponds, rain gardens are a mini-version that are planted with plants that can tolerate wet or dry conditions. In commercial areas like parking lots and roadways, the same thing can be done on a larger scale, which is called a bioretention basin.

The perfect area for a rain garden is on a gentle slope that is well-drained. If your roof naturally dumps the rainwater onto your driveway, you can divert the water through gutters, piping, and gullies that lead to a rain garden.

Rain gardens are typically in a half-circle and range from 100-300 square feet. The depth should be a 4-8" deep depression in the ground. If it is on a slope, the area would be dug out so that the garden is flat and holds some water temporarily. If it is kept shallow, it should not become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

There are some considerations when designing a rain garden. First is placement. Keep a rain garden at least 10 feet from the foundation of your house and 25 feet from a septic system. Place your rain garden in the full sun away from existing trees and do not cut tree roots to make way for your garden. Lastly, do not choose an area that often has standing water. You want the garden encourage infiltration. Feel free to lead

a trouble spot to your rain garden. Before you start digging, always call 811 to get your utility lines marked.

The fun part is planting your garden. You want to keep the design consistent with your overall landscape. You can choose an assortment of trees, shrubs, perennials, and grasses. Keep in mind the height of the plant, bloom time and color, and its overall texture. Many plants that work for a rain garden will also attract wildlife like birds, butterflies, and pollinators, adding some interest to your garden.

Here is a list of some potential plants. For trees, you can choose deciduous varieties such as red maple, river birch, or bald cypress, or evergreen varieties like hollies, magnolias, longleaf pine, or cabbage palms. Shrubs like beautyberry, buttonbush, Virginia willow, wax myrtle, and Walter's viburnum work well. Flowering perennials include swamp milkweed, swamp sunflower, tickseed, blue flag iris, canna lily, and cinnamon fern. Grasses provide texture and include river oats, muhly grass, and cordgrass.

Once you plant your garden, add some mulch to keep in moisture during the drier times. You can also add some various sized stones around the garden to provide more appeal.

Let your yard be the talk of the neighborhood with this unique type of garden. If you don't have a rain garden yet, check out your yard the next time it rains and see where your water flows. When it comes to the environment, you are part of the solution.

For more details on making a rain garden, this website has a plethora of resources, http://www.gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/rain-gardens.html. You can also come to the extension office and check out our rain garden.