



Environmental Commission Newsletter

Township of Long Hill, County of Morris

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Rain Gardens

Water is a non-renewable and degradable natural resource. Only one percent of the water is fresh water, available to sustain life and is only replenished by the natural water cycle. Precipitation is the major source of fresh water available, hence extremely important to manage it for quality and supply. Much of the precipitation runs off the impervious surfaces such as, paved area, roofs and lawns into rivers, carrying pollutant and degrading waterways, increasing flooding and preventing the recharge of ground water. Rain garden is a non-structural green infrastructure that public and private entities can utilize to help alleviate water quality issues, flooding and help recharge the ground water.

US Environmental Protection Agency defines a rain garden as follows: Rain gardens are versatile features that can be installed in almost any unpaved space. Also known as bioretention, or bioinfiltration, cells, they are shallow, vegetated basins that collect and absorb runoff from rooftops, sidewalks, and streets. This practice mimics natural hydrology by infiltrating, and evaporating and transpiring—or “evapotranspiring”—stormwater runoff. A rain garden also attracts beneficial insects, provides habitat for birds and acts as a beautiful landscape feature.



Here are four easy steps on how to build a rain garden: Plan a site, Outline the area and determine the depth, Select native wetland plants via the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers National Wetland Plant List (NWPL) by visiting: http://wetland-plants.usace.army.mil/nwpl_static/index.html and/or visiting local nurseries, Install the garden. There are guidelines available on NJDEP website on how to build a rain garden/bioretention system at https://www.njstormwater.org/bmp_manual/NJ_SWBMP_9.1.pdf. It is also important to maintain the rain gardens by weeding, removing trash that may have washed into the garden, mulching and repairing any damage due to erosion.

WILDFLOWER GARDENS

With spring only a few weeks away, this is a good time to consider turning some (or all) of your garden over to wildflowers. Any sunny patch can be converted into a wildflower garden, which will attract pollinators such as butterflies, hoverflies and bees; host a variety of grasshoppers in summer; and offer insects, seeds and other food for all manner of birds. A large enough patch will even provide nesting opportunities for birds such as wild turkeys.

Unlike a grass lawn, low-maintenance wildflowers need very little mowing - once a year or less. They can usually survive on natural rains and don't require artificial fertilizers and herbicides to look their best.

If you have an open space in your yard or field, you can plant an island of beautiful color with wildflowers. Just create some boundaries and mow around your planting.

Steep banks and slopes are especially hard places for short-rooted grasses to take hold, leaving soil exposed to rain and wind. A steep slope can also very difficult, even dangerous to mow. Why not plant gorgeous wildflowers? They'll hold things together with little or no maintenance.

The greatest threat to spring-planted wildflowers in cold climates is late spring frosts that can kill tender young seedlings. Even after the risk of frosts has passed for the season, you should still wait for the soil and air to warm up enough to provide favorable conditions for your plants to grow without being exposed to stressful conditions. For fast growth and strong, healthy plants, your best bet is to wait for your soil temperature to reach a minimum of 55 degrees F.

To prepare your bed, choose a spot which receives at least six hours of sunshine daily. Mow the chosen area as low as possible and discard of the mowing in your compost. Rake or till the site to a depth of one inch. Choose varieties or seed mixes that are native to the area such as blackeyed susan, larkspur, catchfly, primrose, cornflower, wallflower, poppies and others. A lot of valuable information can be obtained at the Rutgers website:

<https://sebsnjaesnews.rutgers.edu/category/garden/>. Happy gardening!

