



# What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is perennial garden designed to tolerate periods of wet and saturated soils. When it rains, storm water runoff from the street is directed to these gardens. For small rainfall events (less than 1 inch in 24 hours), the rain garden is designed to infiltrate stormwater into the ground. In this manner, storm water runoff is reduced from the area and pollutants are taken up by the rain garden plants.

Since these gardens take runoff from the street, sand and other debris from the road will also be directed to these rain gardens. Routine maintenance to remove the sand and debris is needed by the homeowner for the rain garden to be successful. While a rain garden is designed to accommodate small rainfall events, the larger storms that we experience in the summer will quickly fill up the rain gardens. The gardens have been designed to direct overflow from these areas back into the storm sewer system in the street. In extreme events, the gardens may overflow between houses as well.

## What Do I Need to Do?

### 1. Water your plants

#### First Season

As with any garden, caring for the plants in the first few weeks and months after planting is important. Watering of the plants will be needed to help establish the garden. Usually the plants will need about one inch of water or rainfall per week while they are establishing.

#### After First Season

Once the plants establish, they will not require as much water as they did the first season. Generally, the regular rainfall that we receive should be enough to sustain the plants. However, if the summer gets too dry, watering the garden may be necessary. Avoid using fertilizer near the rain garden as this will promote weed growth.



## 2. Weed your garden

While the garden will be supplied with two inches of shredded wood mulch to prevent moisture loss and reduce weed growth, weeding the garden will be necessary, just as it is with any other garden. Weeding will reduce the competition for light and water, maintain an aesthetically pleasing garden, and reduce the introduction of weedy species into the area. Weeding will likely be necessary throughout the summer.

## 3. Replenish mulch

Your rain garden will be supplied with 2 inches of shredded wood mulch. Since your garden will receive rain water, reducing the potential for mulch to float away is important. Once the garden is planted and established, replenishing the mulch every few years will be necessary. Look for shredded wood mulch products rather than wood chips to reduce the chance of having your mulch wash away.

## 4. Clean up and divide plants in spring

Since a rain garden contains perennial plants, some annual maintenance of the plants is necessary. In the spring, cut the plant back to ground level in March or April if left standing over the winter and remove the plant debris. Some of the plants may need to be divided if they have spread too much or are crowding themselves. In the spring, you can divide or transplant the plants as new shoots begin to emerge. During the summer, you can deadhead spent blooms and remember to water if weather conditions have been dry. If you would rather cut back perennials annually in the fall than the in the spring, you can cut back perennials to ground level once leaves have died in the fall and remove the plant debris.

## 5. Clean up sediment and debris

So far, establishing and maintaining a rain garden has been the same as any perennial garden. The main difference between the two gardens comes with sediment and debris clean up. Since the rain gardens are designed to receive storm water runoff from the street, the sediment and debris from the street will enter your garden. Frequent sweeping and raking to remove this sediment is necessary to maintain the infiltration capacity of the rain garden and to prevent the sediment from covering the entire bottom of your garden. The amount of maintenance needed will be dependent on how much it rains. Your rain garden has been designed so that much of the larger sediment will drop out near the curb line and in the grass that is planted at the inlet to your rain garden. However, the other portions of the garden should be inspected and debris removed frequently throughout the growing season and especially in the spring after the snow has melted.

*For more information, please visit the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Website at [psc.statemn.us](http://psc.statemn.us). Source: WSB & Associates, Inc.*

