What plants are recommended for a rain garden?

The best plants for a rain garden are ones that are native to Oklahoma. Oklahoma is made up of different ecoregions, meaning plants that might do well in a rain garden in Tulsa may not do so well in the Panhandle.

Some examples of native Oklahoma plants for rain gardens are the Blazing Star, Bushy Bluestem, Butterfly Weed, Cardinal Flower, Carolina Buckthorn, Carolina Snail Seed, Elderberry, False Indigo, Gaura, Goldenrod, Indian Blanket, Indian Grass, Indian Paintbrush, Joe-Pye Weed, Passion Flower, PawPaw, Sassafrass, Sunflower, Sumac, and Cockspur Hawthorn.

Again, not all of these plants do well in all parts of the state, and they may have different sun requirements. To help you, additional resources are given at the end of this brochure.

There are several reasons for using native plants such as these in your rain garden:

- They don't need as much water so rain water might be all you need to keep them healthy;
- They are more pest resistant, so there is not a need for chemical pesticide spray;
- Some may be more attractive to birds and butterflies;
- Weeds don't grow as much in gardens with native plants.

Additional Resources on Rain Gardens

- Rain Gardens A how-to manual for homeowners: http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/GWQ037.pdf
- Rain Gardens of West Michigan-Home: A comprehensive site on Rain Gardens: http://www.raingardens.org
- Rain Gardens: Improving the quality of the regions waterways (From the Virginia Department of Forestry) http://www.hrstorm.org/RainGarden.shtml and http://www.dof.virginia.gov/mgt/resources/pub-Rain-Garden-Tech-Guide_2008-05.pdf
- Rain Garden Plants - www.rainscaping.org
- Rain Gardens: A Design Guide for Homeowners in Connecticut - http://nemo.uconn.edu/publications/rain_garden_broch.pdf
- Oklahoma Gardener's Guide by Steve Dobbs; Cool Springs Press (available in bookstores)
- Texas Smartscape: http://www.txsmartscape.com/
- EPA Managing Wet Weather website: http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/greeninfrastructure/technology.cfm

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Rain Gardens

A Beautiful Solution for Water Pollution

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

What are rain gardens?

Rain gardens are a special kind of stormwater garden designed to collect and absorb rain runoff from hard surfaces like roofs. Rain gardens are a natural way for you to help solve stormwater pollution problems and save money on your water bill. Some gardens are built to catch water directly coming out of downspouts (seen in the photo below; the rocks are there to prevent erosion caused by rushing water.) Others may run a plastic pipe underground to a rain garden.

Why rain gardens?

Rain gardens help reduce pollution in our lakes and streams in many ways:

- They increase the amount of water that filters into the ground, which refills local and regional ground water sources;
- They help protect communities from flooding and drainage problems;
- They enhance the beauty of yards and neighborhoods;
- They help protect streams and lakes from urban stormwater pollutants such as lawn fertilizers and pesticides, oil and other fluids that leak from cars, and the numerous harmful substances that wash off roofs and paved areas;
- They provide a valuable habitat for birds, butterflies, and many beneficial insects.

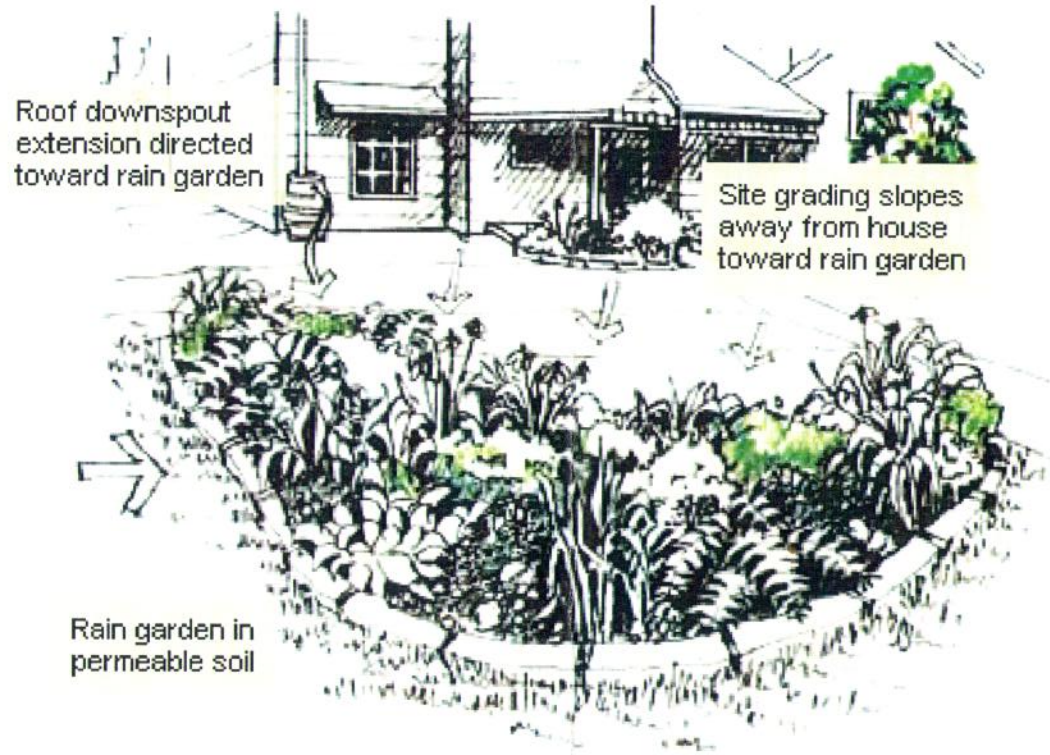
How do I make a rain garden?

When choosing each rain garden site, consider the type of plants you are going to grow and the type of soil you have. The site should also drain rain away from the foundation of the house. The size of the roof or collection area will determine the size of the rain garden and the types of plants that can be grown there.

Rain gardens for single family homes range anywhere from 150 to 400 square feet, depending on the soil type. The more clay in the soil, the less porous it will be, so the larger the garden will need to be. Downspout rain gardens should be 15-20% of the size of your roof if you have sandy soil, 30% for soil containing some clay, and as much as 60% for mostly clay soil.

There is a simple test to make sure that your soil can handle a rain garden. Dig a hole about six inches deep where the rain garden is to go and fill the hole with water. If the water takes more than 24 hours to soak in, the soil is not suitable for a rain garden.

When making a rain garden, dig out an area two to four inches deep for the rain garden and fill the hole with good topsoil that has lots of homemade compost mixed in with it. (Consult the DEQ document "How to Build Compost Bins" to get you started if you don't have one.) Use the soil you dig out to build a berm around the edges of the rain garden.



Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).
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