

HOMEOWNERS GUIDE ON CARE AND MAINTENANCE OF RAIN GARDENS

Are you a homeowner of a subplot with a rain garden on it? Do you need help maintaining this structure or have questions on how to do this? This fact sheet outlines the basics for stormwater management on your property.

What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is a landscaped area planted with native species that acts as nature's "scrubbers", by filtering stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces such as driveways or rooftops. Rain gardens also enhance yards or commercial lots by beautifying the landscape. They are considered a Low Impact Development (LID) practice and can be installed where space may be limited for other stormwater filtration methods.

By installing a rain garden on your property, the stormwater that gets intercepted will be able to infiltrate into the garden, which allows less potentially polluted stormwater to enter streams or other water bodies. As development increases and the loss of natural resources for stormwater treatment no longer exist, alternative methods are being utilized to try to emulate the natural condition and perform these tasks.

A rain garden is installed downslope to intercept stormwater from downspouts or surface water from the landowner's property. A rain garden is designed to hold stormwater for no longer than 48 hours. To allow the plantings to survive, it is not designed to hold water for extended periods of time. Plantings usually consist of native species that like to live in fairly wet soils, and also adapt well to their surroundings making maintenance easier. The plant species help absorb the water, as well as provide deep root systems to filter water back into the soil and recharge the ground water supply. Similarly to a bioretention practice, a rain garden also has a soil medium to allow the stormwater to percolate through but is generally lacking an underdrain. An underdrain is not necessary for rain gardens because they are treating a much smaller amount of surface water runoff, unlike a bioretention practice which is set up to treat a much larger area of surface water runoff.

Although a rain garden is considered low maintenance, care and continued maintenance is key to rain garden longevity and functionality.



Maintenance and Responsibility

Maintenance for your rain garden is especially important for the first few years until the plantings are established. In order to avoid bare areas within the rain garden that may lead to erosion, it is important to maintain healthy plants and replace any dead or diseased plants. Watering replaced plants will depend on the soil, weather and temperature at the time of planting. If the rain garden is newly established, watering of the plants should be done early in the morning and adequately depending on the rainfall received.

Weeding out of the invasive species should be done on a regular basis to avoid encroachment to the plants. It is recommended to label the plantings in order to decipher the difference between them and the invasive species.

As with a bioretention practice, a rain garden also depends on a soil medium for the filtration process. This soil medium consists of sandy, porous mix with a mulch cover. Over time, the mulch may become compacted and/or decayed and will need to be replaced approximately every one to three years.



The mission of Geauga Soil and Water Conservation District is "To conserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of Geauga county by providing leadership, education, and assistance to all."

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Maintenance and Responsibility contd.

The mulch layer should be replaced at no greater than 3 inches. Some soil may also need to be replaced along the berms where erosion may occur. Check the entire rain garden for any other soil erosion and replace soil where needed.



Rain gardens, whether they are located on a commercial or residential lot may be the responsibility of a business, individual homeowner, or homeowner association. Rain garden ownership and maintenance responsibility is typically outlined in the Deed Restrictions for subdivisions or within a Declaration of Restrictive Covenants if not within a subdivision. Either document should identify the owners, how it will be funded and who will ultimately perform inspections and maintenance. If the responsibility is unknown, check with the Geauga SWCD. Sometimes, the rain gardens are contained within a Drainage Maintenance District and the major maintenance will be the responsibility of the County Engineer.

When conducting rain garden maintenance, there are some activities that should not be done without obtaining permission from Geauga SWCD. For example, the shape, depth or location of the rain garden is specified within the Deed Restrictions or Declaration of Restrictive Covenants and cannot be altered without prior written consent of the Geauga SWCD.

A maintenance checklist is recommended to be used to document condition of the rain garden and maintenance performed on the rain garden. This checklist should be accompanied by a dedicated schedule for rain garden maintenance. Below are some basic suggestions to be considered in the rain garden maintenance checklist:

Rain Garden Biannual Maintenance		Yes/No or N/A	Comments
<i>Date of Inspection</i>	<i>Inspected By</i>		
Remove litter and debris			
Replace or remove any diseased, undesirable or dead plants			
Prune and weed plants for appearance			
Check the surrounding grass area for erosion			
Check for adequate mulch cover			
Ensure rain garden dewater within 48 hours between storms			
Rain Garden Annual Maintenance		Yes/No or N/A	Comments
<i>Date of Inspection</i>	<i>Inspected By</i>		
Remove old compacted mulch and replace with new mulch at a depth no greater than 3 inches			
Repair any eroded areas within the garden or surrounding area			

Information for this brochure was provided by Geauga County SWCD and NEO Pipe along with the Scenic River Retreat and Nero Park Rain Garden O&M Plan. Pictures provided for this brochure taken by Bob Kehres.

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