Build a Rain Garden in 10 Steps



Materials

- Shovel & pick
- Ruler, stick or wood scrap
- Pencil or marker
- Compost, sand or gravel
- Moisture-loving native plants
- Shredded hard wood mulch
- Decorative rock

Step 1: Call before you dig. Contact local utilities (WAPA, Vitelco, Cable, VIWMA) to have them mark locations of underground wires, cables or pipes.

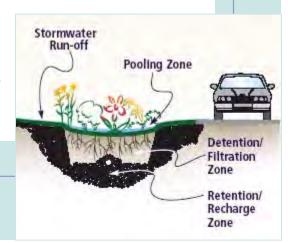
Step 2: Pick a location. A rain garden should be at least 10 feet from foundations and fence posts, and 25 feet from septic system drain fields and well heads.

Step 3: Measure drainage rate. Dig a hole about the size of a large coffee can. Insert a ruler or stick into the hole. Fill the hole with water from a hose or bucket and mark the water level on the ruler. Wait four hours, then measure & mark the water level again. To determine the daily percolation, multiply the amount of water (in inches) that has drained in four hours by six. (_____ inches every 4 hours x 6 = _____ inches every 24 hours)

Your rain garden should empty within 24 hours, so if you can drain 6 inches in that much time, dig 6 inches down. If the water in your test hole doesn't drain well, consider different placement, or add gravel, compost, or sand (see Step 7).

Step 4: Determine the garden's depth. It should be no more than 6—12 inches deeper than the surrounding soil, but you can place it in the bottom of a larger landscape depression or slope.

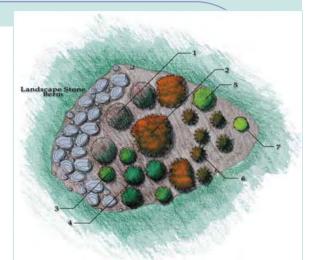
Step 5: Outline the garden location. Use string and wooden stakes or a garden hose to mark the general placement. Think about the land's slope and where heavy rain may come in and flow out; don't orient the garden so that overflow runs into your foundation or septic system.



Build a Rain Garden in 10 Steps (cont.)

Step 6: Dig in. The depression should be within your marked outline and to the depth you determined in the previous steps. Note: The most common cause of failure of a rain garden is soil compaction. *It is essential to avoid compaction of soils during all phases of construction.*

Step 7: Check the drainage rate again. Fill the depression with water, then measure the infiltration rate as in Step 3. If the drainage is poor, remove 3—4 more inches of soil and till in some sand, gravel or compost to a depth of 1 foot, then check drainage again.



Step 8: Add vegetation. Put native or naturalized plants that can tolerate "wet feet" in the lowest places. Lightly cover with additional soil if necessary, but don't fill the depression completely.

Step 9: Mulch to keep the weeds out. You may also want to install decorative rock at the points where rain water enters the rain garden and where overflow from heavy storms exits the garden to prevent erosion.

Step 10: Water. Until the plants are established—especially during the dry season—it is beneficial to water to 1 inch at least once a week. If there's regular overflow from the depression, you may wish to enlarge it or build a series of rain gardens with connecting drainage notches.

Maintenance. Regular maintenance is required to keep your rain garden looking good and functioning well. Periodically weed and prune dead vegetation and plants that are too big. Rake mulch periodically and replenish mulch yearly.



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