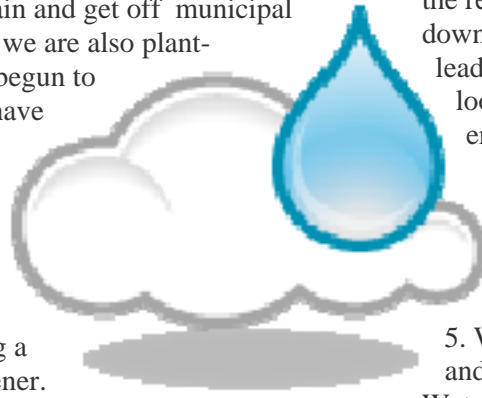


Rain Gardening 101

What word is on all gardeners' lips as our climate rapidly changes? Yes, it is **water**. The reduction of worldwide annual rainfall has prompted partial or even complete bans for those wishing to water gardens and lawns. This means that water we relied on before has not been available as needed. As gardeners we know there are a number of things we can do during periods of drought.

Look through the Ontario Horticultural Association's newly published booklet *Roll Out The Barrel* to see how easily you can capture rain and get off municipal and well water. As gardeners we are also plant-wise and many have already begun to choose and grow plants that have the ability to survive with less water. Of course, our garden soil is humus rich to maintain as much moisture as possible. It seems that 'Everything old is new again' when it comes to being a conservation-conscious gardener.



And then there was this year! Granted, there were some areas in Ontario that received little rain while the rest of the province was suffering a deluge. This was the summer for a **Rain Garden** whether your season was wet or dry. Not only can a rain garden keep water on your site, but as your plants are nourished, pollutants and impurities are prevented from flowing into our watersheds. No romantic showers tapping lightly on the roof but great deluges of water were the order of the day after a number of dry summers, causing pollution in our waterways, overflowing storm drains, flooding basements, and sewer systems under great stress. This is a trend that is predicted to continue as more land areas are hard surfaced and water no longer can soak naturally into the ground.

A rain garden is designed to catch and absorb rainwater from your roof, driveway, and any other hard surfaces where rain cannot soak in. A six inch deep depression will do the trick. This is then filled with plants that can handle both dry and wet periods. Their deep roots take in lots of water and keep erosion at bay. Imagine the beauty of a rain garden filled with many of your favourite plants with colourful flowers, fall foliage, seeds, and berries. Native plants would be at the top of your list of selections.

Some Hints on Creating a Rain Garden:

1. Check for where water coming off your roof ends up as it flows away. Site your garden ten feet away from the house foundation to prevent basement moisture.
2. The recommended size is 20 to 30 percent of your roof surface.
3. A depth of four to eight inches is sufficient. Go deeper if you are going to beef up your soil or plan to use mulch. Slope the sides and if your property slopes, use the removed soil to build a berm to collect water on the downside. A shallow channel from your downspout will lead the water to your rain garden. Some people like the look of river rock in the garden and it helps to prevent erosion.
4. As suggested, native plants are ideal for this garden. Add some shrubs and small trees for interest. Large trees are water hogs.
5. Weeding is necessary as in any garden. Mulch well and place plants close together to help keep weeds out. Watering is required but less during a drought if rainfall has been channelled into the garden during one of those deluges.

Properties of a Rain Garden:

- Keeps water that falls on your property in the soil.
- Helps to maintain the water table.
- Reduces erosion, especially on sloping property.
- Acts as a filter for pollutants - fertilizers, herbicides, road salt and so on.
- Helps to keep our local waterways clean.
- Is a magnet for butterflies, birds and pollinators.
- A low maintenance area of your yard means less lawn to mow and lower water bills.
- Does not stay wet or breed mosquitoes.

Rain Gardens work. Include one in your garden. Add plants you have elsewhere to make it fit into your landscaping, then pat yourself on the back as you contemplate the beauty of your garden and the good you are doing for your rivers and streams.

**Dorothy Shropshire,
Conservation Committee**