

CENTRAL OHIO RAIN GARDEN INITIATIVE

THE RAIN GARDENER



2nd Quarter 2010
Volume 1, Issue 2

www.centralohioraingardens.org

A Note from the Chair

By Stephanie Suter

Most of the plants in our rain gardens are just waking up from their winter naps, excited to get started using rain water and sunshine. Unlike the dormant plants, we have been pretty busy this past winter gathering information about rain gardens installed last fall, planning for rain gardens to be implemented this spring, and meeting with organizations to give them rain garden ideas!

Rain gardens of all sizes and locations were installed last year, bringing our total of rain gardens from around 30 in 2008 to 71 in 2009 to 103 in 2010! These **103 rain gardens** are a combined 51,545 square feet, and they collect **3.72 million gallons of storm water per year!**

The largest rain garden installed last year was 7,000 square feet, put in by the Franklin County Engineers.

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The largest network of rain gardens installed was 8 in a park, totaling 20,000 square feet of gardens. The smallest was 37 square feet, installed at a residential property. No matter the size, intention, or location of rain gardens, they are all contributing to improving the biological and physical integrity of our streams, as well as putting a bright spot in our neighborhoods. Keep up the great work, everyone!

2010 Second Quarter Calendar of Events

April

April 20-21: Virtual H2O Event

This online conference is free and requires no travel! CORGI will present rain gardens during this event, but there are many other great programs. Check out www.virtualh2oevent.com for info or to register.

April 22: Earth Day – 40th Anniversary

April 29, 6:30pm: Brook Run meeting at Innis House

Residents of our neighborhood rain garden project in Brook Run will meet with CORGI to discuss next steps, questions, and logistics of their rain garden installations.

May

May 6, 6:30-8pm: Rain Garden Workshop at the Grange Insurance Audubon Center

Join CORGI and learn all about rain gardens – what they are, benefits, design, and see an example on-site! Door prizes of 10 rain garden kits, courtesy of the Sierra Club

Ohio Chapter. Registration is \$5 and forms are online at www.centralohioraingardens.org.

Mid-May: Rain garden installations in Brook Run begin!

May 21, 7:30-10:30pm: 'Riverfest on Tour' kickoff at Genoa Park near COSI

Enjoy this free event to start the celebration of River Pride Month, June. Visit www.riverfestcolumbus.org for more updates on events during June.

June

June is River Pride Month

June 10-11: Ohio Stormwater Conference at Kalahari Resort in Sandusky, OH

CORGI will be featured as a presenter at this fantastic conference that covers environmental issues, new technologies, regulatory information, and pollution prevention. Visit www.ohioswa.com/conf_home.php for more information!

Finally – A Rain Garden Manual for SW Ohio!

By Holly Utrata-Halcomb, Hamilton SWCD Administrator

There has been a lot of enthusiasm for rain gardens generated by articles, workshops, and the “Going Green” movement in Hamilton County. Our Soil & Water Conservation District receives many calls a week asking for site assessments and assistance designing rain gardens.

Unfortunately, up until now, many of the reference publications used to provide this advice were not written to address our SW Ohio soils and growing climate. As part of the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati’s consent decree with US EPA for mitigation to combined sewer overflows, a new manual has been born – “Rain Gardens for Southwest Ohio”.

This effort was spearheaded by Dave Dyke, Extension Educator from OSU Extension in Hamilton County. Dave organized a committee of experts from US EPA, The Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Gardens, The Ohio State University, Hamilton County SWCD and Storm Water District, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service, to put together a rain garden manual for homeowners. Special emphasis was placed on soil amendments and both native plants and other cultivated

Planting of
Cincinnati Zoo
rain garden at
May 2009
workshop



plants. All plants listed in the extensive plant list have been trialed at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden.

Soils in our region tend to be high in clay. Manuals from other states recommend amending soil with equal parts sand, compost, and original soil. Research has shown that it is not advisable to add sand to our heavy clay soils unless it makes up 60% of the total bed content. Clay soil performs best when mixed with 50% compost.

You can access a copy of the 43-page manual by going to www.hcswcd.org and click on News & Publications in the left hand column. If you prefer a hard copy, one may be purchased by sending a check for \$8.00 to Hamilton County SWCD, 22 Triangle Park Dr., Cincinnati, Ohio 45246.

Featured Rain Garden Project

Submitted by: City of Columbus

The Gay Street infrastructure and streetscape conversion in 2007 promoted the City of Columbus’ environmental philosophy of leading by example and exemplified all six Green Principles of Mayor Michael Coleman’s *Get Green Columbus* program. Approximately one million of the \$6.4 million Gay Street budget was invested in environmental enhancements, including evergreens, 100 trees, ground cover, plantings, and landscaped medians.

Two rain gardens were designed for the project and added to Gay at Pearl and Normandy Streets. These rain gardens educate downtown workers, residents, business owners, students, and visitors about the issues that storm water runoff creates. The installations help solve problems of sewer overflows and contribute to groundwater recharge, a natural process that is interrupted by soil compaction and hard surfaces created during urban development.

The Pearl rain garden is bordered by a seating area and offers an inviting spot for lunch and rests. The plantings at Normandy Street provide natural elements which also aid in softening the straight lines of the adjacent concrete and steel parking garage.

Capital Crossroads Special Improvement District, a

private-sector organization voluntarily funded by more than 500 property owners dedicated to making downtown the most attractive commercial area in central Ohio, prunes, maintains, and replaces plantings as necessary for the Gay Street rain gardens. The group’s arrangement with the City of Columbus saves labor and material costs for the city and engages residents and business owners in an environmental initiative on one of the busiest downtown streets.



The City of Columbus continues to be a leader in adding rain gardens. To date, rain gardens have been built at Overbrook Drive and North High Street, Westgate Park, Casto Park, and elsewhere. Stones from the Alum Creek dam in Wolfe Park were incorporated into the rain garden at COSI. The RiverSouth mixed-use development, a collaborative effort between the city and the private sector, includes a bioretention basin at Town and Front Streets next to the Lazarus building. More rain gardens are in the planning stages citywide.

Featured Plant – Smooth Phlox

By Linda Johnson, Scioto Gardens Nursery



Photo from
www.robspplants.com

This quarter's featured plant is smooth phlox, *Phlox glaberrima*. 'Morris Berd' smooth phlox is a cultivar selected for pink flowers with a distinct white center in spring. The flowers create a spectacular carpet of pink. You can cut them back after flowering for additional blooms. Smooth phlox has glossy dark green foliage that is very disease resistant. The plants are generally clump formers but can spread to cover some ground without being too aggressive. 'Morris Berd' grows 12" tall while other smooth phlox may be a little taller, growing 24-36". Spacing plants about 18" apart is suggested.

Smooth phlox is native from Ohio to Wisconsin, south to east Texas and east to Florida. It is usually found in wet meadows, low woods, and prairies. A great native phlox for moist soils. Excellent for rain gardens. It tolerates some drought once established. Smooth phlox does well in full sun to partial shade. Cold hardy in Zones 4 to 8.

Plants that grow well with smooth phlox include turtlehead, marsh marigold, false blue indigo, irises, Joe-pye weeds, hibiscus, hardy ageratum, Northern sea oats, and sweet grass.



Ask CORGI!

(Graphic from <http://avatars.yahoo.com>)

In this section of the newsletter, we would like to answer YOUR questions! Please submit questions by going to our website www.centralohioraingardens.org and selecting "Contact Us." You can fill in your question in the on-line form. Below are some common questions that we receive and their answers.

1. Do you give presentations for organizations? (Several submissions for this question)

Yes, we are excited to pass along educational and technical information to local organizations. Please visit our website under Contact Us, and submit a request!

2. Would the tree lawn area of a yard be usable for a rain garden? (Question submitted by Ann J.)

We're assuming that by "tree lawn area" you mean the area between the sidewalk and curb of your property. If this is the case, it may be an appropriate area, but remember that sometimes utilities are buried under this area – gas, water, and storm water. If you know that your area is clear of utilities (because you've already called OUPS and they marked your property) and large trees, then you can cut off your downspout at the entry point of your lawn area to have the storm water enter. Be sure to slope the sides all around inside this area, so passersby don't fall into an 8" drop-off. Lots of time this area has been filled with leftover soil from the original construction, so adding compost to help with nutrients and drainage will you're your plants and infiltration rates. Sometimes the municipality actually owns this area, otherwise known as a right-of-way, so understand that they can come through and take out your planting if they have a maintenance issue and need to dig in that area.

3. Can I plant a rain garden in the spring? (Question often asked at presentations)

Yes! Both spring and fall are good times to plant. Larger plant stock might be purchased during the spring months for rain garden installation as the smaller plants are a little more susceptible to getting flushed away easily. If you use smaller plant stock, it's a good idea to not connect your downspout to your rain garden until your plants have had a little time to get adjusted to their new home, maybe wait about a week for them to get started. Your plants will enjoy their new home if you've chosen the right ones. You can contact your local nursery, Master Gardeners, or search online to find out the suitability of plants you're planning to use. Also, be sure to plan ahead according to the weather forecasts, and avoid excavating or planting when soils are wet for both the soil's sake and yours. Avoid planting too far into the summer.

Rain Garden Planning – Getting the Water to the Garden

Once we've planned our garden all winter and finally get the chance to get in the dirt to install our rain garden, little particulars we hadn't thought of arise. For example, "It looked good on paper, but how am I going to get my downspout water to my rain garden?" It may seem pretty straight forward or even just a second thought, but this part of the installation process is very important.

Remember throughout changing the drainage from your downspout to your rain garden that water flows downhill and on the path of least resistance. There are many ways to direct this water into your garden, and here are a couple of examples:



1. Disconnect your downspout at the base and re-route through a "dry streambed". This is a shallow (6"), plastic-lined, rock channel that guides water into your garden. You can level the top of the rocks even with the grass so you can mow right over it. It will need to be sloped "downhill" into the garden.

If your property is pretty level and you don't have any slope from your house to your yard, you can still create that downhill slope in the dry streambed by just making the part closest to the downspout shallower than the end that empties into the garden. Fill your channel with cobble stones (fist-sized), river rock, or even smaller stone. Be sure to cap the part of the downspout next to the house that goes underground that won't be used.

2. Divert your downspout directly into the garden. Cut the part of the downspout off that goes underground. The downspout pipe should be above the grade of the garden and stones can be used to disperse the water.



3. Use overflow from your rain barrel. The overflow hose that comes off of a rain barrel can be directed into your rain garden through a buried pipe or holding the overflow hose in place with other media.

Submit Your Rain Garden!

We are diligently working on adding a Residential Gardens feature to our website. Currently we list all the public rain gardens in Central Ohio you can visit. We'd like to expand this to our residential rain gardeners. Visit our website and click on "Submit Your Rain Garden", and attach a picture of it! We will soon be loading residential rain gardens on the website, and we will NOT be posting your address, just your city or township where you live.

Thanks, and good luck with your rain garden installation this year!

Resources You Can Use

Central Ohio Rain Garden Initiative – www.centralohioraingardens.org

Ohio Utilities Protection Service (OUPS) – www.oups.org or (800)362-2764 or 8-1-1 "Call Before You Dig!"

Signs

A sign for a rain garden is a good idea to let your neighbors know that your garden has a purpose. CORGI sells rain garden yard signs for \$15, and you can fill in the amount of storm water collected per year on these signs. Please call (614) 486-9613 if you are interested.

