Rain Garden Challenge 2011
By Stephanie Suter, Chair

Funding was awarded to Franklin Soil and Water through a Community Development Block Grant to provide installations of rain gardens, an educational component, and cost-share for 15 low to moderate income households in Franklin County. This project was named “Rain Garden Challenge 2011”.

A total of four townships have been chosen for installing a demonstration rain garden. Although the grant project only required three rain gardens to be implemented, additional funding from Franklin Soil and Water’s Conservation Fund will accommodate the additional interested township. Clinton, Mifflin, Prairie, and Hamilton Townships will be a part of this important grant project.

In combination with rain garden installations at each of the four townships, an educational workshop will be provided for interested township residents to be held at the township demonstration rain garden location. The workshops will include information on what rain gardens are, their benefits, how to install them, and local examples. Information about the cost-share portion of the grant project will also be presented.

A cost-share application for targeted residents has been developed. After the workshops, each resident will have an opportunity to see a rain garden in the stage between excavation and planting. Residents are invited to help plant and mulch the rain garden at their corresponding workshop. Advertising for the workshops will be on CORGI’s website, Franklin Soil and Water’s website, the townships’ websites, facebook, and in local papers. Postcards will be sent to residents that may qualify for this cost-share program.

Be on the look out for updates on the progress of the township rain gardens!

2011 Second Quarter Calendar of Events

April
April 15 & 16: Annual Plant Sale Pick-Up Dates
Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District’s annual tree, shrub, and wildflower pre-order sale ended. Pick-up for items will be at the Franklin Soil and Water garages behind 1328 Dublin Rd. Columbus 43215.

April 16: Earth Day Worksites
Sign up at www.LightenUp2011.org to volunteer for various Earth Day projects!

April 23: Earth Day Celebration!
Join the Earth Day festivities at Franklin Park – visit www.LightenUp2011.org to learn more!

April 30: Mifflin Township Rain Garden Workshop & Installation (155 Ridenour Rd.)

May
May 5-6: Rain Garden Kit Pick-Up Dates
Orders for rain garden kits through Franklin Soil and Water’s annual spring sale will be at their office at 1328 Dublin Rd., Ste. 101 Columbus 43215.

May 11-3: Ohio Stormwater Conference
Visit http://www.ohioswa.com/conf_home.php

May 7: Clinton Township Rain Garden Workshop & Installation (3820 Cleveland Ave.)

May 14: Clinton Township Rain Garden Workshop & Installation (999 Chambers Rd.)

May 21: Prairie Township Rain Garden Workshop & Installation (6725 Alkire Rd.)

June
June 11: Hamilton Township Rain Garden Workshop & Installation (6400 Lockbourne Rd.)
Are you looking for a way to improve the environment around your own house? Do you like to see a variety of wildlife out your windows? Do you want to keep the streams and rivers in your community clean? Then why not install a rain garden!? They provide habitat for birds, bees and butterflies, are pretty to look at, reduce the amount of yard you have to mow, and protect our streams and rivers by reducing the amount of runoff leaving your yard.

In 2009 I installed one in my yard and found it to be a great experience with the added benefit that I now get excited every time the rain comes.

I decided to build a rain garden after becoming MORPC’s representative to the Central Ohio Rain Garden Initiative and learning how effective they can be at reducing runoff from rooftops, driveways, and streets. So in the fall of 2008 I called Stephanie Suter at Franklin Soil and Water to come out to my house and help me assess the suitability of my yard for a rain garden. In the pouring rain, what luck, we traipsed around my yard examining sites.

Originally I thought I would put one in the front and one in the back but Stephanie pointed out the very large and old silver maple on the edge of the yard that completely overhangs the backyard. She explained that a rain garden in that location would require cutting through a great many roots possibly killing or damaging the tree and that the “extra” water from a rain garden might have the same effect overwatering your houseplants. So, no rain garden in the backyard.

Luckily both the front and rear gutters drain to the street through the same pipe. I could build one garden in the front, properly sized, that could handle all of the water. The only problem is that my neighbors also have an ancient silver maple that overhangs part of the front yard. We determined there was enough room and only the edge of the garden would be under the drip line of the tree.

With that Stephanie left with the task of calculating the roof area that would drain to the garden. My next task was to dig a hole where the garden would go 8 inches in diameter and 8 inches deep, fill it with water, let it drain, then fill it again. This time I was to mark the starting level of the water and come back in 24 hours to see how far it had drained. The number of inches it went down would be how deep my garden should be. I came back in 15 minutes and it was down over an inch. In 45 minutes it had gone down over three inches. If you’ve done the math that would mean a garden about 8ft deep, except that I knew from a workshop that rain gardens should not be more than a foot deep. What my infiltration test really showed was that I could make my garden a little deeper than most and smaller in square footage.

All of this occurred in the fall of 2008 but I decided to wait until spring to build the garden since I was planning on purchasing my plants from the Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District tree and plant sale.

When the sale came around I decided to go ahead and buy the plants before I started digging as added motivation to complete the project. I knew the plants would be coming on April 17th so the garden had to be ready by then. On March 15th I went to Home Depot and rented a sod cutter, some of the best money I spent. It only took about an hour to cut out the sod and I had a bare spot in the side yard it fit into well. Then I began to dig by hand. I had a slope in my yard so I needed to build up an embankment. This allowed me to keep most of the dirt I was digging on site. The extra ended up in a pile behind the garage.

The strings in the picture were leveled and used to measure the depth of the garden so the bottom would be level when finished.

It took several days of digging for a couple hours at a time to finish the basic excavation, but by March 19th I had it to this stage. Now it was ready for the addition of compost and tilling.

(continued on page 3)
A Rain Garden of My Own

By March 30\textsuperscript{th} the garden was tilled and all I needed to do was tie it into the drainage pipe from the gutters and install my overflow pipe.

By April 17\textsuperscript{th} the garden was ready for planting. With the help of my father-in-law and mom we got them all planted.

On April 19\textsuperscript{th} we had our first rain fall with it all connected. It filled with about 3 inches of water during the heaviest rains. By the time I got home that evening, it had drained completely.

By the end of the second growing season, the plants have filled in beautifully and the garden has seen dozens of butterflies stop by and at least half-dozen goldfinches come for a smorgasbord daily.

Brook Run Project Update

The sixteen residential rain gardens and five rain gardens in the right-of-ways that were installed last year in the Brook Run subdivision in Westerville are receiving accolades. The project will be highlighted at the Ohio Stormwater Conference in May during the tours and the presentation sessions. Stephanie Suter and Cathy Eichel will also have the opportunity to present CORGI’s project at StormCon in Anaheim, CA.

Preliminary results of the project are showing an 80\% reduction in storm water runoff. Anticipated results were expected to be around 55\%.

Don’t forget to submit your rain garden online today!

www.centralohioraingardens.org
Featured Plants: Milkweeds

**Butterfly weed**

*By Anita Musser, City of Columbus & CORGI member*

Butterfly weed, or *asclepias tuberosa*, adds a splash of orange to any garden. The plant blooms intermittently between June and September and its flat-topped flower clusters are long-lasting. The bright color attracts Swallowtail butterflies and Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds enjoy the flower’s nectar. The plant’s long, narrow and hairy leaves are a food source for the monarch caterpillar and their dark green color provides a stark contrast to its flowers.

Butterfly weed plants like full to partial sun and they prefer sandy, well-drained soil. They are drought-tolerant, so place them on an outer edge of your rain garden. Plants develop as a single stem then branch out to form a small bush as it matures. It will grow up to three feet tall.

Distinct banana-shaped seed pods develop in the fall and will eventually burst open dispersing dandelion-like seeds that are carried by the wind. The root system is long, thick and knobby, so once the plant is established it may not survive a move.

This plant requires very little maintenance. It will thrive throughout the growing season with very little attention and will die back to ground level in the fall.

*Photo credit: J.S. Peterson from http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=ASTU*

---

**Swamp Milkweed**

*By Gale Martin, Owner of Natives in Harmony Nursery*

We know that a rain garden is an attractive, landscaped area planted with perennial native plants which don’t mind getting “wet feet.” Another great aspect of a rain garden is that it can provide habitat and food for a variety of wildlife including Monarch butterflies.

This quarter’s featured plant is *Asclepias incarnata*, better known by its common name Swamp or Marsh Milkweed. With sweetly scented clusters of rose-pink flowers in July and August, its ability to attract butterflies and other pollinators, and the fact that monarch larvae feed on the foliage, this plant is a hit either way you look at it!

Although Swamp Milkweed grows naturally in swamps, along streams and ponds and in wet meadows, it also grows well in the average garden. It is native to Ohio and thrives in full sun to part sun and will grow anywhere from 3 to 4 feet in height. Spacing plants about 24-36” apart is suggested.

The plants have deep taproots and are best left undisturbed once established. As with most milkweeds, the foliage is not tolerant of frost and is slow to emerge in spring, so don’t despair if it isn’t up when many other species are beginning to leaf out. A clump of this plant will just get bigger and better every year and being chomped on by caterpillars, although a bit disfiguring, doesn’t really hurt the plant at all.

An added plus is that the caterpillars don’t go too far away from the milkweed plant after eating their fill to begin the pupal stage. The caterpillar constructs a shiny green and gold speckled chrysalis, usually close by the host plant, and watching a new Monarch emerge in about 10 to 14 days is a wonderful sight!

---

**Resources You Can Use**

Central Ohio Rain Garden Initiative – [www.centralohioraingardens.org](http://www.centralohioraingardens.org)
Ohio Utilities Protection Service (OUPS) – [www.oups.org](http://www.oups.org) or (800)362-2764 or 8-1-1 “Call Before You Dig!”