

# **GROW A BETTER RAIN GARDEN**

## **7/11 Rain Gardening Tips**

### **7 MAINTENANCE TIPS**

**MT #1** If rainwater runoff can't flow in, it's not a rain garden!

**MT #2** Once the water is in the garden, "slow it, spread it, sink it" (don't send it directly to the emergency overflow drain).

**MT #3** No bare soil! Bare soil gets compacted, can't absorb water, so make sure all soil is protected by plants or a coarse porous mulch such as arborist woodchips. Use a thin layer of gravel in areas where water flows (50-50  $\frac{3}{4}$ " crush and torpedo gravel works well, is easy to spot-weed).

**MT #4** Shear when really necessary (eg lavenders), but prefer selective pruning/thinning (stays done longer, enhances protective canopy cover that improves garden's ability to manage water).

**MT #5** Maintain tidy garden edges, so that a more "relaxed" style of garden interior looks intentional and acceptable. That relaxed style (fuller plant canopies, leaf litter) helps the garden absorb more water.

**MT #6** Let the garden evolve. Shade will probably increase over time, encouraging some plants and not others. Plants may shift their locations to better suit their needs, or entirely unintended plants may volunteer in the garden. "Edit" as needed, but be open to the garden's own creative impulses.

**MT #7** If a rain garden consistently performs poorly &/or requires constant maintenance, strategize key changes that will improve the situation while disturbing the fewest established plants.

### **11 PLANTING TIPS -- It's more about the principles than about the specific plant choices**

**PT #1** Rain gardens offer a wide variety of growing conditions, wet to dry & sun to shade. Therefore, you can plant just about anything you want, somewhere in one rain garden or another.

**PT #2** Plants are often more adaptable than we think. In a rain garden, shade-lovers may surprise you by thriving in full sun, drought-lovers may surprise you by tolerating winter wet feet.

**PT #3** Both native plants & non-invasive garden varieties can perform well in a rain garden. Non-natives can help make a rain garden look "floral" & intentional, and therefore more acceptable to the community.

**PT #4** Rain gardens benefit from generous numbers of evergreen plants for year-round structure & high performance (especially in areas with rainy winters).

**PT #5** The more trees the better (evergreen & deciduous).

**PT #6** Be sparing & cautious in your use of the following types of understory plants:

- rhizomatous
- tall 'n' bulky
- thorny
- floppy

**PT #7** Be generous in your use of the following types of understory plants:

- “well-behaved” non-spreaders, clumpers
- thigh-high or shorter (eg dwarf cultivars)
- evergreen (needle or broadleaf)
- structural (no need for staking, lifting off other plants or shearing voluminous dead foliage)
- not thorny (unless pruning rarely needed eg Berberis ‘Concorde’, compact roses)

**PT #8** Large drifts of the same plant, contrasting colours & textures, are good, just as in any landscape design.

**PT #9** Choose groundcovers that will still look good if, over time, they happen to intermingle into a multi-species tapestry.

**PT #10** Anchor the water zone & banks against erosion. Boulders, rocks & gravel in moderation are okay, but they don't absorb water. Woody debris is good (logs, stumps). Plants are best.

**PT #11** Once the basic plantings are in place, add personal, informal touches if you can (favourite perennials even if higher-maintenance, quirky logs, the local preschool's painted rocks, etc.).

Personal touches will:

- increase our own pleasure & sense of ownership / stewardship of the garden
- draw the public's attention
- inspire their affection for the garden (and hopefully, by extension, for nature)
- remind them that municipal gardeners are people too!

**Better rain gardens can help restore nature to urban areas 🐾**

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