

TIPS for REDUCED RAIN GARDEN MAINTENANCE

(1) Make sufficient slope & drop-off at rainwater intake to allow for build-up of sediments, without blocking flow. Then sediments needn't be removed often (especially relevant for rain gardens on high-traffic streets that generate lots of brake & tire dust). Consider also a slab or forebay, to trap sediments for easier removal.

(2) Avoid use of landscape fabric, drain rock. These make weeding more difficult over time. They also interfere with water absorption, as well as with root establishment of desirable plants.

(3) Use soils rich in organic matter, to hold moisture better and reduce need for irrigation. The best rain gardens are "sponges" not "sand filters" -- many soil mixes are too sandy.

(4) Plant generously, so there's less bare ground for weeds. If a garden gets crowded after a few years, thin out excess plants.

(5) Choose

- limbed-up trees
- groundcovers
- dwarf shrubs (max 24")
- other naturally low-growing ferns, perennials, sedges, grasses
- at least 50% evergreen plants to reduce splash erosion & increase infiltration during winter rains

(6) Avoid or use sparingly

- vigorously rhizomatous plants (ones that spread by underground runners)
- thorny plants (exception: Berberis 'Concord')
- floppy plants (tall grasses & perennials can look unkempt, ditch-like)
- shrubs that grow to person-height (including often-recommended natives such as red-flowering currant, red osier dogwood, salmonberry)

(7) Mulch rain garden banks annually with 2-to-4 inch layer of woodchips, until plant canopies have covered all bare soil. (*Note: not bark mulch, not compost, but **woodchips**.*) Woodchips:

- suppress weeds that sprout underneath & are inhospitable to weed seeds that drop in from above
- make any weeds that do grow much easier to pull
- maximize water absorption by reducing soil compaction & crusting due to pounding rain, blazing sun
- maximize moisture retention, minimize any need for summer irrigation during plant establishment
- encourage soil organisms and microorganisms that increase nutrients and water-holding capacity
- serve as slow-release fertilizer and soil conditioner

(8) Mulch areas where water will stand or flow with a 50-50 mixture of ¾" clear crush and torpedo gravel. This mixture stays in place, yet remains un-compacted enough to be easily weedable. (River rock aka cobble is difficult and time-consuming to weed.) Over time, sediments and plants will obscure the gravel mixture; leave as is, or optionally, spot-refresh with a thin new layer of gravel for aesthetics.

(9) Use manual maintenance techniques (grab 'n' snip pruning rather than machine shearing; hand pulling or digging of weeds rather than hoeing or tilling). Though initially more time consuming, these techniques result in mature plants & soils that are well-behaved and more self-maintaining. Machine tools tend to produce rebellious plants that are a constant battle to control, and ever-disturbed soils that are a constant magnet for weeds.

Suggested November 2020 by:

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