



Planting the rain garden is the fun part. Use your imagination – be creative.

There's no single best way to plant a rain garden. Anyone who has ever done any gardening will have no problem planting a rain garden, but a few basic reminders are listed.

To fill your garden, you will need a variety of plants that includes different moisture tolerances, different heights and blooming times. Your garden will probably look sparse at first, but give it time. It will fill in. All gardens take a few years to mature and look their best. You can also add more plants or replace plants that do not survive or that you decide you don't like later.

- 1.** Remember that a rain garden is like a shallow dish, so water will be in the middle or bottom of the garden for longer periods of time than it will be on the edges/top of the garden. You will need to choose plants for the bottom of the garden that can handle a lot of moisture, plants for the inside slopes that can handle medium moisture and plants for the top of the garden that can handle dried conditions.
- 2.** Consider all physical site restrictions and limitations. Choose plants that are appropriate for the sunlight exposure and soil condition of your garden. To ensure that all of the plants are visible, you will want to plant taller plants behind shorter ones. If your garden will not be viewed from the back as much, then you should plant the tallest plants at the back of the garden and work your way toward with progressively shorter plants. If the garden will be viewed from all sides, you should plant the tallest plants in the middle and radiate outward with progressively shorter plants.
- 3.** Choose plants that are aesthetically pleasing to you. You may want to ensure that something in your rain garden is blooming from spring until fall. This means making note of the blooming times of your plant choices and coordinating your choices to ensure that you will have beautiful blooms throughout the growing season! Your garden will also be seen during winter months, so try and choose some plants that will make your garden interesting all year round – grasses and woody plants are good choices for winter interest. You may want to choose a theme. Many people choose native plants that attract hummingbirds or butterflies.
- 4.** Make sure you have at least a rough plan for which plants will be planted where. Lay out the plants as planned one foot apart in a grid pattern, keeping them in containers if possible until they are actually planted to prevent drying out before they get in the ground.

5. A monoculture border (all one species) will give the rain garden a defining edge and a well kept appearance. Typically the border will be a low growing grass, such as blue grama or wintergreen. The border can be planted on the sloping edge of the rain garden.
6. On the floor of the rain garden, plant a variety of species that bloom throughout the growing season. Plant clumps of each species in groups of 3 or 5 (or higher odd-numbers if your garden is large) with spacing of at least one foot apart. Select lower growing native plants that don't grow more than 3-4 feet high.
7. Plugs are a relatively cheap and effective way to establish plants in a rain garden. Plugs are very small plants about 1-2 inches wide and 4-6 inches long and generally come in 6 or 9-packs. They look pretty scrawny compared to big potted plants but they establish quickly and catch up to their larger counterparts usually within a year's time. But if money allows, you can select potted plants that have a well established root system. Potted plants will give your garden a full look instantly but because they have been pampered in a garden center, may require a larger time to become adjusted to their new garden home.
8. Dig each hole twice as wide as the plant plug and deep enough to keep the crown of the young plant level with the existing grade (just as it was growing in the cell pack or container). Make sure the crown is level and then fill the hole and firmly tamp around the roots to avoid air pockets. Stick plant labels next to each individual grouping to help identify young native plants from non-desirable species (weeds) as you weed the garden.
9. When planting the rain garden, try to minimize foot traffic. Work from the side if possible. On larger, wider rain gardens build small bridges that span the width of the rain garden and work from them or lay an extension ladder across the rain garden with a piece of plywood board on it to provide a work platform.

Seeds are cheap and widely available but not recommended for rain gardens because of their tendency to float away and they sometimes take a few years to become established.

Mulching

Apply mulch evenly over the bed approximately three inches thick, but avoid burying the crown of the plants. The mulch will help minimize the loss of moisture. The mulch depth will also provide a barrier between seeds of the more prolific self-seeding species and the soil. As an extra barrier to weed growth, newspapers can be laid flat between the plants before the mulch is applied to the surface. Renewing the mulch every year until the plants have filled out is recommended so the soil does not dry out too rapidly. Mulching is usually not necessary after the fourth growing season, unless the "mulched look" is desired.