

# *Rain Gardens*

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### **What is a rain garden?**

A rain garden is a depressed area of land planted with species that encourage water absorption. They act as a filtration system that can be incorporated into urban systems and runoff sites. Rain gardens have many uses. They prevent contaminated, fast moving water from directly entering larger streams and other water bodies. Plants, often perennials, can be planted in these spaces to soak up excess water and slow runoff rates to reduce flooding. Plants in rain gardens can also uptake pollutants and excess minerals, including heavy metals. Rain gardens can also filter excess sediment that gather in urban streams due to high levels of surrounding impervious surfaces, making these ecosystems cleaner and healthier.

### **Where are they found?**

Rain gardens are often found in urban settings, especially in yards near runoff areas. Runoff areas can be a driveway, roof, sidewalk, road, etc.

### **What kinds of plants grow in them?**

Often, native plants are used in rain gardens. This is because native plants are already adapted to the climate of the region and require little watering. Native plants also help maintain historical habitats for animals like birds and pollinators. This is especially important in urban landscapes where biodiversity and green spaces are disappearing. *See the below chart for further details and characteristics of rain garden plants that we have in the SER-UW Native Plant Nursery.*

### **What sort of maintenance do rain gardens need?**

One perk of a rain garden over a traditional garden is less maintenance is required. Natural precipitation negates the need for regular watering, and plants already adapted to local soil regimes do not require extensive fertilization treatments. Regular weeding of invasive plants will keep native species happy and thriving. If plants were incorporated into a rain garden specifically to uptake and store pollutants, eventual removal and replacement of those plants will be required to keep the pollutants from reentering the ecosystem upon the plant's death and decomposition.

## Can anyone start a rain garden? Can you?

We hope so! You will need space, time for planning, installation, and maintenance, and the ability to acquire plants and other materials. Make sure to check local and state requirements and existing utilities so that there are no conflicts with your project. It is recommended that over the winter months you plan for your rain garden, build the rain garden in summer or early fall, and plant your plants in the fall. This timeline prevents erosion in winter, and also allows plants to establish during the rainy winter months. During the winter before you plan to install your rain garden, note how water drains (or doesn't drain!) on your site, and determine what size and location of rain garden would fit the space. Plan on how water will enter your rain garden and how excess water will leave it. To build your rain garden, first excavate soil and level the bottom. Mix compost with your existing soil and return it to the site, but leave room for water to pool. Line with rocks. When you plant, select a mix of grasses, shrubs, and small trees. After planting, cover the ground with mulch to prevent erosion and the growth of weeds, and water your plants. All that's left to do is keep the water entries and exits clear and weed and water as needed!

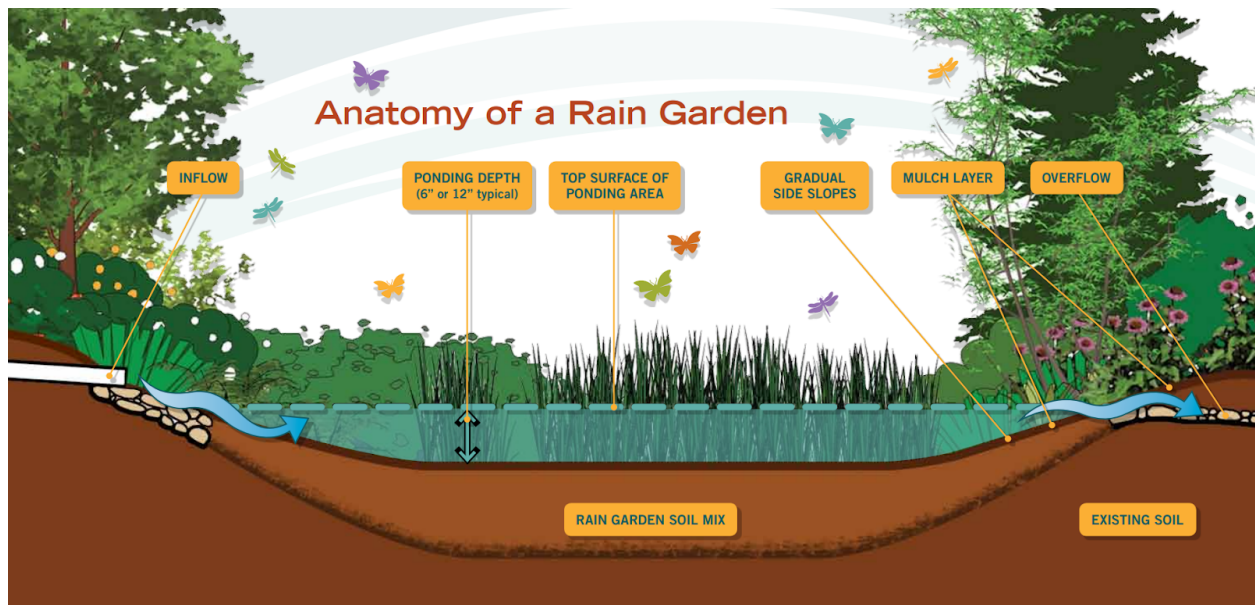





Image from Washington Department of Ecology's "Rain Garden Handbook"

## So, which plants should you actually put in your rain garden?














Here at the Nursery, we would love to help you find your new plants! Below is an up to date list of all the species in our inventory, and some of their characteristics relevant to rain gardens.

Species Common Name	Species Latin Name	Plant Types	Dry/Wet	Sun/Shade	Other
Nodding Onion	<i>Allium cernuum</i>		 	 	
Douglas aster	<i>Aster subspicatus</i>		  	 	 
Common Camas	<i>Camassia quamash</i>		 	 	
Dewey's Sedge	<i>Carex leptopoda</i>			 	
Slough Sedge	<i>Carex obnupta</i>	 	 	  	
Beaked Hazelnut	<i>Corylus cornuta</i>		 		
Redosier Dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i>		  	 	 
Black hawthorn	<i>Crataegus douglasii</i>			 	
Wild Rye	<i>Elymus glaucus</i>			 	
Salal	<i>Gaultheria shallon</i>		 		
Puget Sound Gumweed	<i>Grindelia integrifolia</i>		  		 
Tapertip Rush	<i>Juncus acuminatus</i>	 		 	
Tall Oregon Grape	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>		 	 	 
Dull Oregon grape	<i>Mahonia nervosa</i>		 	 	 
Devil's club	<i>Oplopanax horridus</i>			 	
Redwood sorrel	<i>Oxalis oregana</i>			 	



Slender Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla gracilis</i>		 		 
Heal-all	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>			 	 
Douglas fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>			 	
Garry Oak	<i>Quercus garryana</i>				
Prickly currant	<i>Ribes lacustre</i>		 	 	
White bark raspberry	<i>Rubus leucodermis</i>			 	
Salmonberry	<i>Rubus spectabilis</i>		  	  	 
Trailing Blackberry	<i>Rubus ursinus</i>		 	  	
Sitka willow	<i>Salix sitchensis</i>			 	
Hardstem Bulrush	<i>Schoenoplectus acutus</i>	 			
Hardhack	<i>Spiraea douglasii</i>		 	 	 
Western Red Cedar	<i>Thuja plicata</i>		 	 	

## Legend

 Emergent (roots submerged)	 Low moisture	 Full sun	 Best rain garden plant
 Evergreen	 Medium moisture	 Partial sun	 Good for pollinators
 Perennial bulb	 High moisture	 Full shade	
 Deciduous			
 Herbaceous perennial			

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