



*Cooperative Extension Supports
Youth Environmental Stewardship*

Promotional Article

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Rain Gardens are a beautiful way to protect water quality

Madison, Wis. – Planting a rain garden near a school, church, community center or other public building can be a great project for a 4-H club or other youth group. Constructing and planting a rain garden is a great community volunteer service opportunity. It's also a way youth can learn some important lessons about the environment and how a rain garden can help protect water quality.

A rain garden is a slightly sunken perennial garden that collects rainwater from a roof or paved area. It allows water to seep into the soil, rather than run off into storm sewers and, eventually, lakes and streams.

"Sometimes, people feel frustrated by complex environmental problems because it seems there is little anyone can do to make a difference," says Suzanne Wade, a University of Wisconsin natural resources educator who works on programs in the Rock River Basin. "A rain garden, however, is a way for people to do the right thing. Rain gardens are beautiful too."

Rain gardens are similar to any garden. Instead of being planted in a planter or a raised bed, rain gardens are planted in a four- to eight-inch deep depression. It is then filled with native perennial flowering plants that can handle repeated flooding and drying out.

These gardens benefit the environment because they increase the amount of water filtering into the ground, recharging groundwater and reducing the amount of pollutants washing into lakes and streams. They can help prevent flooding and

drainage problems, reduce shoreline erosion, and provide valuable wildlife habitats. If enough people constructed rain gardens, they could even reduce the need for costly municipal storm water treatment structures.

University of Wisconsin-Extension encourages youth to get involved in their communities and the environment through a new program called CES YES. The initials stand for Cooperative Extension Supports Youth Environmental Stewardship. This new initiative provides lots of help and information about things young people can do as environmental stewards. It's all available on a website at <http://nrem.net/cesyes>. Or you can ask for information at your county Extension office.

"With some adult encouragement and assistance, a youth group can construct and plant a rain garden," said Elaine Andrews, a UW-Extension environmental education specialist who works with the CES YES program. "The project would help beautify a public space, help protect water quality, and provide an important opportunity for hands-on learning about the environment."

If your 4-H club or youth group is interested in learning more about planting a rain garden, you can find information in two University of Wisconsin-Extension publications: "Rain Gardens: A household way to improve water quality in your community" and "Rain Gardens: A how-to manual for homeowners." Both can be downloaded free of charge at <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden/index.html>.