



# Create a Rain Garden

*Corralling excess water in your yard is critical to prevent damage and reduce pollution downstream. Good news is it's also easy.* BY OSCAR H. WILL III

**APRIL SHOWERS CAN BRING A LOT MORE** than May flowers, particularly if you have low spots in the yard that puddle, or slopes susceptible to damage from a real gully washer. Add in the potential to send fertilizers and soil into the local waterways, and spring showers can lead to significant environmental damage. You'll know if you have a big problem on your place if your downspouts are currently discharging into a trench that you didn't dig or that mud puddle in the middle of the backyard gets worse every year.

What can you do? One of the most sensible ways to handle runoff in your yard is with landscape features called rain gardens, and spring is a great time to get such a project going.

Rain gardens consist of a shallow depression in the soil or the equivalent created with berm on sloped ground. The structures collect runoff, slowing the flow so that water can percolate into the soil and prevent nonpoint source pollution downstream.

These carefully constructed earthworks are planted with perennials and shrubs that can tolerate high loads of fertilizer and can stand to have their roots either wet and dry for periods of time. Your County Extension office is a good place to discover which plants work best in your area.

Most rain gardens are self-contained—constructed so the excess moisture percolates into the surrounding soils. In some cases, however, particularly when the local water table is within several feet of the surface, rain garden design may call for under-draining. In this case, infrastructure is installed beneath the garden to carry runoff to a suitable and legal discharge point. Since permitting and construction complexities associated with under-drained rain gardens are more daunting, we'll consider the self-contained rain garden here.