



# RAIN GARDEN Q&A

  
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## MOSQUITOES AND RAIN GARDENS

- This is not a concern if your rain garden is functioning properly
  - Water collected in your rain garden should drain within 24 to 48 hours
  - Mosquitoes need longer to breed
  - Toads, frogs and other predators also help manage mosquitoes
- When establishing a rain garden, make sure to amend the soil as needed with compost
  - Improves drainage in heavy soils
  - Increases water holding ability in fast draining soils to minimize need to water in drought
- If your existing rain garden holds water longer you can:
  - Topdress with compost and vertical mulch
  - Expand the size of your rain garden

## PLAN FOR SUCCESS

- Step-by-Step Guidance in the [WI DNR Rain Gardens: A Guide for Homeowners and Landscapers](#)
- Minimize maintenance and increase success
  - Location 6', preferably 10' and no more than 30' from your home's foundation
    - The further from you home, the more water collected and needs to be managed
  - 2' from walks and drives to avoid damaging these hardscapes
  - Avoid:
    - Areas where water collects
    - Water lateral and underground utilities
    - Existing trees
    - Steep slopes
      - \* You'll need to dig deeper

- \* Larger berm to help capture and slow overflowing water
- \* Install a retaining wall

## HOW BIG TO MAKE YOUR RAIN GARDEN

- [Rain Garden Calculator](#) can help
- 100' to 300' is a good start
  - Larger gardens can manage more water volume
  - Larger gardens require more work to install and maintain

## INSTALLING A RAIN GARDEN IN HEAVY CLAY SOIL

- Check the soil texture - clay, loam or sand
  - Ribbon test
    - Push a sample of soil between forefinger and thumb
    - A 2" or longer ribbon means lots of clay
- Check the drainage in the area where you want to install the garden
  - Dig a hole 1' deep and 1' wide
  - Fill the hole with water and let it drain
  - Refill the hole and measure the drop in water after 15 minutes
  - Multiply by 4 to get hourly infiltration rate
    - Drains 1 to 3" / hour is ideal
    - Less than 1" / hour is poor drainage
    - More than 4" / hour is fast draining
- Improve drainage
  - You'll need a deeper rain garden
    - Depths are typically 3 to 8"
  - Remove 3 to 4" of soil and use as berm or elsewhere in your landscape
  - Add several inches of compost or other organic amendment
  - Till the compost one foot deep
    - Breaking through any hard pan

## Fresh Coast Guardians

Fresh Coast Guardians are everyday people who love Lake Michigan and want to protect it.

You can help us prevent polluted storm runoff from reaching our waterways by managing water better when it rains or snows.

Learn more at  
[freshcoastguardians.com](https://freshcoastguardians.com)

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- Incorporates organic matter into the soil where the plant roots will grow

### BEST PLANTS FOR YOUR RAIN GARDEN

- Many to choose from and you will find lists on local Water Utilities, University, Nature Center and other reliable websites
- Select plants that:
  - Tolerate flooding and drought
  - Are hardy in your area
  - Are suited to the available sunlight
- Avoid overly aggressive plants

### HERE ARE A FEW LESS AGGRESSIVE RAIN GARDEN PLANTS TO CONSIDER FOR FULL SUN

#### **PRAIRIE SMOKE** - *Geum triflorum*

- Full sun
- 6" tall
- Space 6"
- Pink flowers April/May - June
- Attractive smoky seed heads
- Loam and sand soil
  - Moist to dry
- Spreads gradually, making a nice groundcover
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 6

#### **PURPLE PRAIRIE CLOVER** - *Dalea purpurea*

- 1-2' tall
- Space 1'
- Blooms July - August
- Clay, loam and sandy soils
- Birds, pollinator host plant
- Tap root helps it adapt, but challenging to move established plants
- Zones 3 to 8

#### **PURPLE LOVEGRASS** - *Eragrostis spectabilis*

- 1-2' tall
- Space 1'
- Blooms July - September
- Sandy soil
- Host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 10

#### **SKY BLUE ASTER** - *Aster azureus*

- Full sun to light shade
- 2-3' tall
- Space 1' apart
- Blue flowers August - October
- Adaptable, mesic-dry, loam and sandy soil
- Birds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Zones 3 to 8

#### **BUTTERFLY WEED** - *Asclepias tuberosa*

- 2-3' tall
- Space 12-18"
- Blooms June - August
- Loam and sandy soils
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators
- Monarch host plant
- Deer resistant
- Slow to emerge in spring, so mark the location to avoid accidentally digging up the plants
- Zones 3 to 10

#### **SIDEOATS GRAMA** - *Bouteloua curtipendula*

- 2-3' tall
- Space 1'
- Blooms August - September
- Loam and sandy soils
- Birds, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 9

### MMSD

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District's (MMSD) mission is to protect public health and the environment.

MMSD is a regional government agency that provides water reclamation and flood management services for 1.1 million people in 28 communities in the Greater Milwaukee Area.

Learn more at [mmsd.com](http://mmsd.com)





### **HOARY VERVAIN** - *Verbena stricta*

- 2-4' tall
- Space 1'
  - Not aggressive
- Blooms July - September
  - 4 to 6 weeks
- Loam and sandy soils
  - Drought resistant
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 8

### **BLUE FALSE INDIGO** - *Baptisia australis*

- Full sun to light shade
- 3-5' tall
- Space 2-3' apart
- Blue flowers May - June
- Clay, loam, sand - mesic soils
- Pollinators, hummingbirds, host plant, deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 9

### **SWAMP MILKWEED / RED MILKWEED**

*Asclepias incarnata*

- 3-5' tall
- Space 12-18"
- Blooms June - July
  - Fragrant
- Clay, loam and sandy soils
- Hummingbirds, birds, butterflies, pollinators
- Monarch host plant
- Zones 3 to 9

### **BLUE VERVAIN** - *Verbena hastata*

- 3-6' tall
- Space 1'
- Blooms July - September
  - Up to 2 months
- Clay, loam and sandy soils
  - Moisture lover
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 8

### **FOR SUN TO PART SHADE**

### **DOWNY WOOD MINT** - *Blephilia ciliata*

- 1-2' tall
- Space 12-18"
- Blooms June - July
- Medium to well-drained soils
- Butterflies, pollinators
- Deer resistant
- Zones 4 to 8

### **GREAT BLUE LOBELIA** - *Lobelia siphilitica*

- 1-4' tall
- Space 1'
  - Forms colonies if properly sited
  - Not overly aggressive
- Blooms July - September
- Clay, loam and sandy soils
  - Easier than Cardinal Flower
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 9



### **About Melinda**

Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has over 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including *Can't Miss Small Space Gardening*, the recently revised *Midwest Gardener's Handbook*, and Jackson and Perkins' *Beautiful Roses Made Easy*. She hosts the nationally-syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" program airing on radio stations throughout the U.S. Melinda also hosts the internationally distributed Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD/Instant Video series, including the latest *Food Gardening for Everyone* DVD set. She is a columnist and contributing editor for *Birds & Blooms* magazine, and writes a nationally-distributed gardening column. She appears regularly as a guest expert on national and local television and radio shows.

Visit Melinda's website,  
**[melindamyers.com](http://melindamyers.com)**



### LEAD PLANT - *Amorpha canescens*

- 2-3' tall
- Space 2'
  - Takes a few years to mature
  - Do not cut back when young
- Blooms June - July
- Loam and sandy soils
  - Taproot, so very drought tolerant
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Zones 3 to 8

### NEW JERSEY TEA

*Ceanothus americanus*

- 2-3'
- Space 3'
- Blooms July - August
- Loam and sandy soils
- Hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- **Shrub**
- Zones 3 to 9

### PRAIRIE DROPSEED

*Sporobolus heterolepsis*

- 2-3' tall
- Space 2'
- Blooms August - September
  - Fragrant flowers
  - Seeds coated with ice look like gems in the garden
- Loam and sandy soils
- Birds, pollinators
- Foliage turns gold in fall
- Zones 3 to 8

### LAVENDER HYSSOP

*Agastache foeniculum*

- 2-4'
- Space 1'
- Blooms July - September
- Loam and sandy soils
- Hummingbirds, birds, butterflies, pollinators
- Deer resistant
- Zones 2 to 6

### **PLANTS FOR SHADE**

#### **PLAINS OVAL SEDGE** - *Carex brevior*

- Full sun to shade
- 1' tall
- Space 6-10"
- Green flowers April - May
- Moist, wet - dry soils
- Food source for insects, seeds for birds
- Zones 3 to 8

#### **WILD COLUMBINE** - *Aquilegia canadensis*

- 1-3' tall
- Space 1'
- Blooms May - June
- Loam and sandy soils
- Birds, hummingbirds, butterflies, pollinators, host plant
- Deer resistant
- Reseeds readily
- Zones 3 to 8

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MMSD's spring plant sale is open now with prices on natives up to 50% off retail prices. Not only will you beautify your yard, but you will be doing your part to help attract pollinators and protect our Great Lake. Please keep in mind that **supplies are limited**, so if inventory sells out, the sale will end prior to April 3<sup>rd</sup>. To learn more, watch our rain garden webinar recordings or visit [freshcoastguardians.com](http://freshcoastguardians.com)

- Learn more by watching the webinar recording of [How to Select Rain Garden Plants](#) and [DOWNLOAD THE HANDOUT](#)
- A bit on the [toxicity of the plants discussed](#)
- Those gardening in the Milwaukee Metro Sewerage District service area can take advantage of their [Rain Garden Plant Sale](#) until April 3<sup>rd</sup> or until supplies last - so order soon!

#### REDUCING MAINTENANCE

- Starts with proper site preparation and plant selection
- Watering
  - Critical first two years while plants establish
  - Once established, water garden during extended drought
- Weeds
  - Pull as soon as possible
    - Easier to remove when small and soil is moist
    - Once they set seed, you will have hundreds more to pull next year
    - When you mow, shoot clippings away from the garden
  - Continue to monitor and remove weeds as they appear

- Watch for and remove invasive plants
- Mulch the garden at planting and as needed until the plants are established and cover the ground
  - Select mulch that will stay in place, like a fibrous shredded mulch
  - Mulch conserves moisture
  - Mulch protects the soil during heavy rainfalls
  - Mulch helps suppress weeds
  - Mulch improves the soil as it decomposes
- Fertilization
  - At planting
    - Soil test will tell you what, if any, fertilizer is needed
- Thinning and replacing plants
  - Dig and divide plants that have outgrown their space
  - Remove struggling plants
  - Remove overly aggressive plants taking over the garden
- Clean up
  - Leave healthy plants stand for winter
  - Wait to cut back until temperatures are in the 50's



- Make sure gutters are cleared of debris so water flows
- Remove debris from swale and garden
- Winter care
  - Do not pile snow or use deicing salts in the rain garden
    - Snow exposed to deicing salts transferred during snow removal

### MANAGING CATTAILS

- Managing Cattails with Water Level Control

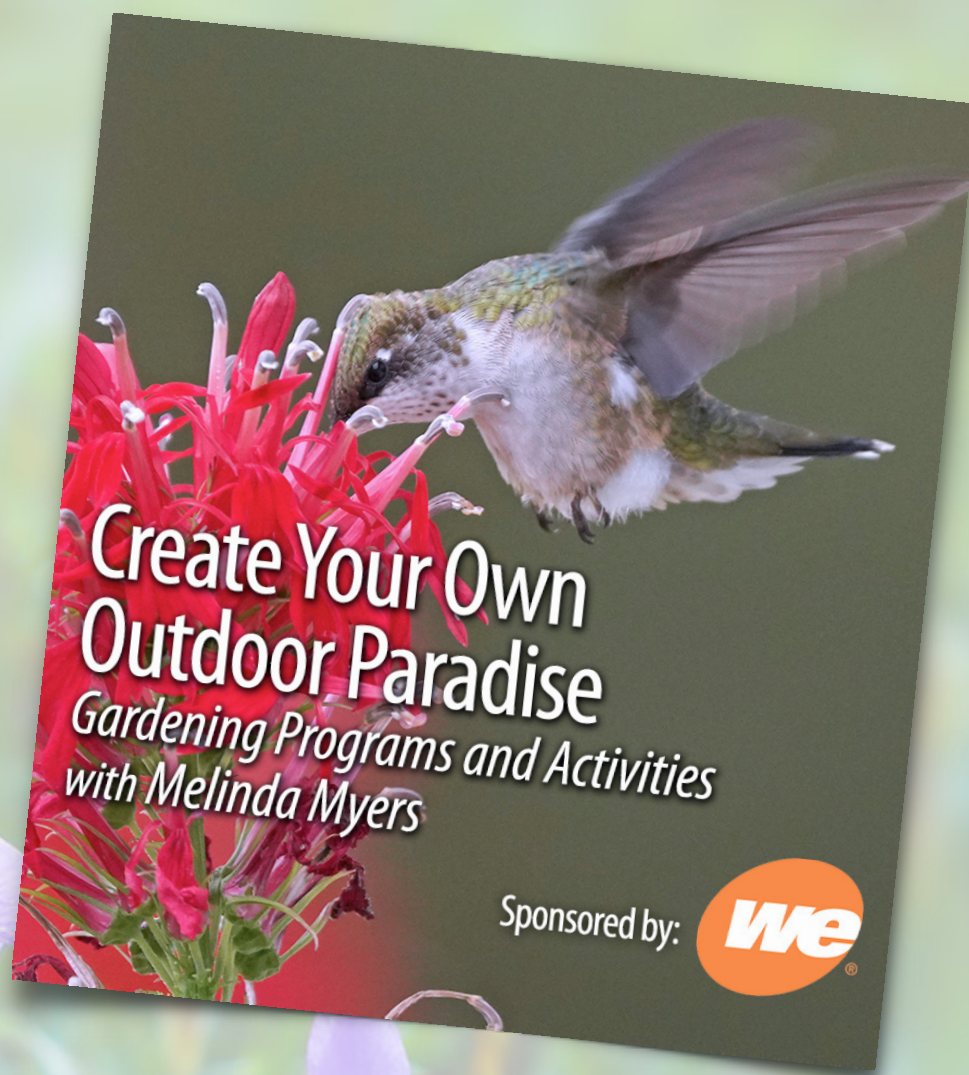
### SEDIMENT BUILD UP IN RAIN GARDENS

- Monitor rain garden for sediment that can impede water infiltration
  - Check every 3 to 4 months
  - Check after heavy rainfalls
- Use a flat shovel to remove sediment
  - Be careful not to damage the plants
- Make sure rain garden is large enough to handle water volume

### CALL 811 AT LEAST 3 BUSINESS DAYS BEFORE YOU PUT THE FIRST SHOVEL IN THE GROUND

In Wisconsin you can also file an online request at [diggershotline.com](http://diggershotline.com). Contact this free service at least three business days in advance of digging. Diggers in Wisconsin or your underground utility locating service will contact all the appropriate companies.

These companies will mark the location of their underground utilities in the designated work area. This reduces the danger and inconvenience of accidentally knocking out power, cable or other utilities while creating a beautiful landscape and productive garden.



Create Your Own  
Outdoor Paradise  
Gardening Programs and Activities  
with Melinda Myers

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## **UPCOMING APPEARANCES & WEBINARS**

*Check often as more appearances and webinars continue to be added.*

**March 29<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>**

REALTORS Home & Garden Show

**Webinar April 2<sup>nd</sup>**

*Container Gardens for Sun and Shade*

**Webinar April 10<sup>th</sup>**

*Reinvigorate Your Rain Garden*

**April 12<sup>th</sup>**

Pasquesi Home & Gardens

**April 26<sup>th</sup>**

Ebert's Greenhouse Village

**May 3<sup>rd</sup>**

*Gardening Talk @ North Lake School*

**Webinar May 7<sup>th</sup>**

*Vertical Gardening*

**May 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>**

Ebert's Greenhouse Village

**Webinar May 15<sup>th</sup>**

*7 Steps to Managing Water on Your Property*

**Webinar June 4<sup>th</sup>**

*Attracting Hummingbirds*

**June 8<sup>th</sup>**

Ebert's Greenhouse Village





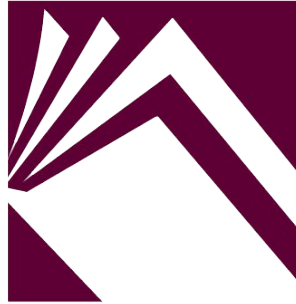
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Sponsoring this Webinar!*





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