Spring 2003

ANACOSTIA RIVER BUSINESS COALITION UPDATE

C/O ICPRB
6110 Executive Boulevard, Suite 300
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Rain Gardens: Beautifying your Business and Helping the Anacostia

Interested in simple, inexpensive ways to reduce your business' impact on the environment? Would you like to receive credit and publicity for your pollution prevention activities? Read on! If you like what you read, contact Steve Saari at (301) 984-1908x103 or **ssaari@icprb.org** for more information, or to set up a free and confidential evaluation of your business' property.

Rain . . . it's nature's way of nourishing our world and replenishing our water sources. However, many of our daily activities, from changing a car's oil to fertilizing lawns, can turn this precious resource into an environmental problem. The flow of water created by a rainstorm - storm water runoff - can be polluted by oil, chemicals, pesticides, and sediments built up on our lawns, driveways, streets, and parking lots. Rain washes these pollutants into storm drains and ultimately into local streams and rivers.

Why is Storm Water a Problem?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has determined that up to 70% of the pollution in our surface waters comes from storm water. We tend to think that most of this is caused by large industrial facilities, but this is not the case. Many studies have found that more than 50% of that pollution comes from small businesses, individuals and homeowners, due to lawn care, household chemicals and automobile usage.

What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is an attractive native plant garden with a special purpose: to reduce and filter the storm water entering our streams.
It is constructed as a place to direct storm water from roofs, driveways and parking lots, allowing water to be held in the plants, mulch and soil.

Rain Gardens aren't just for houses! In fact, the use of rain gardens for storm water management originated at commercial and industrial sites where space is limited, and the installation and maintenance of conventional environmental practices, such as oil and water separators and stormwater ponds, is expensive.

A Rain Garden Collecting Runoff from a Parking Lot in Prince George's County

Why a Rain Garden?

Rain Gardens use the concept of bioretention: a water quality practice in which plants and soils remove pollutants from storm water naturally.

Rain Gardens are created in a low-lying area, with specific layers of soil, sand, and organic mulch. These layers naturally filter the rain as it runs into the Rain Garden. During the next few days after a storm, the soil absorbs and stores the rainwater and nourishes the Garden's grasses, trees, and flowers.

The traditional system of curbs, gutters, and storm drains carries storm water runoff directly to local streams and rivers without any bioretention filtering process. Instead, Rain Gardens filter and reuse the water, reducing storm water pollution, while providing attractive landscaping.

In addition to their water quality benefits, Rain Gardens:

- ✓ Promote your business' environmental stewardship and community pride
- ✓ Provide habitat for wildlife and native plants
- ✓ Moderate air temperatures through evaporation
- ✓ Increase real estate values by creating an aesthetically pleasing landscape

Upcoming Events

Earth Day Tree Plantings at DC Schools - Volunteers are needed to help school children plant trees. Plantings will occur at various sites in the District between April 22nd and April 25th. For more information, contact Habieba Isreal at 202-535-2964.

Earth Day Anacostia River Cleanup - Volunteers are needed to help clean up sites in D.C. and P.G. County. The cleanup will take place the morning of April 26th. For more information, contact James Willie at 202-479-6710.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: - Don't rain gardens attract a lot of mosquitoes?

A: - No. For reproduction, mosquitoes require a number of days in standing water. Water rarely stands long enough for mosquito reproduction in a well-designed rain garden.

Q: - Can I create a rain garden that doesn't look too wild or messy?

A: - Yes! A wide variety of plants can be used in creating a rain garden so you can create one that suites your tastes.

Q: - What happens to water-tolerant plants when we have a dry spell?

A: - Native plants can withstand a range of weather conditions. Native plants that do well in poorly drained soil will be fine during dry weather.

Q: - How large must a rain garden be to be worthwhile?

A: - Any water that seeps into the ground instead of running into a storm sewer helps water quality. A rain garden of any size has a positive impact, however, to completely absorb rain water from a site the system should be sized between 5% and 10% of the impervious area draining to it.

Q: - How difficult are rain gardens to maintain?
A: - Rain gardens are like any other garden. They require more care initially to establish the plants, but then only monthly inspections are needed to repair eroding areas, prune and repair vegetation and remove trash and debris.