How to build a Rain Garden.

Did you know you could build a Rain Garden with Native Plants that absorb rainwater?

What is a Rain Garden?

Rain gardens are defined as landscaped areas planted with native species designed to soak up stormwater runoff from roofs, driveways, and lawns.

Basics of Building a Residential Rain Garden

- **Sizing Your Garden:** Volume of water draining to the garden from the roof will be equal to the square footage of the house multiplied by the percentage of the roof feeding the downspouts to the garden, plus the surface area of your paved driveway.
- **Select Best Location:** Stay within 10 feet from foundation of home. Avoid underground utility lines. Plant in partial to full sun exposure.
- **Plant Away:** Plant high on edge of garden to raise roots above ponded water level. Mulch area with 2-3 inches of hardwood mulch.
- **Soils and Drainage:** Check that soil is suitable for drainage.
- **Garden Construction:** Dig 4-6 inches, create a berm, cover berm with grass or mulch to prevent erosion and add compost to top layer of soil.

Examples of Native Plants for your Rain Garden

- **Broadleaf Arrowhead** (1 -2' June-September)
- **Buttonbush** (3 -6' July-August)
- **Cardinal Flower** (2 -4' July-September)
- **Culver's Root** (3 -5' June-August)
- **False Dragonhead** (2-4' July-September)
- **Prairie** (2-4' July-September)
- More examples can be found at the Allegheny County District Website.

Caring for the Plants:

- **Trimming:** Overgrown vegetation in a rain garden is controlled through trimming and pruning. It is important to remember that mowing a rain garden is not recommended. Pruning trees should occur in the winter or before late-March. Flowering plants should be pruned immediately after they have finished blooming, typically in the fall.

- **Weeding:** Like any other garden, weeds can take over within the first few years of planting. Using non-chemical methods such as hand pulling and hoeing are recommended. Mulching can also control weeds.
- **Watering:** During the first year, plants should be watered at least once a week or more especially during hot, dry periods. After plants become established, watering is only necessary during drought conditions
- **Fertilizing:** The plants chosen for a rain garden are designed to absorb excess nitrogen and phosphorus that is typically comprised in stormwater runoff. As a result, fertilizing a rain garden will not be necessary.
- **Replanting:** Not every plant will survive when first planting the rain garden. Making sure your rain garden is lush with vegetation is important in controlling stormwater runoff. Replanting should take place during cool weather; i.e. early to mid-fall or spring. However, trees can be planted anytime when the ground is not frozen. Not all plants or trees can be replanted. A rain garden is designed with carefully selected species that can handle variable water levels, exposure to sun and/or shade, and soil types. Therefore, it's important to replant using the same or similar species.

Source information for this article provided by www.dep.pa.gov