



Maintaining Your Rain Garden

Rain water gardens, just like any garden, need maintenance to look good and perform properly. However a well-designed rain garden needs minimal care. The following tips should help guide you to a beautiful and functional rain water garden.

Mulching

Mulching retains moisture, prevents erosion, controls weeds, replenishes the organic material in the soil and improves infiltration. Every year or two (spring is preferable) check the mulch layer and, if needed, add shredded hardwood mulch to maintain a layer 2-3 inches thick. Small quantities of organic mulch can be mixed in with new mulch if desired. This can be done any time of year, but protecting the soil during dry summer periods is especially beneficial. Once a full groundcover is established or plant materials become very dense, mulching may not be as necessary.

Watering

During the first couple years most plants need some watering during extended dry periods. The plants chosen are all natives or cultivars of native plants and are well adapted to harsh Minnesota winters and dry summer periods. During the first couple years, water the garden during dry periods to aid in getting the plants established. After the second year watering is only needed during extended dry periods. A good rule of thumb is an inch of rain a week during the first couple years.

Fertilizing

Rain gardens are designed to absorb excess nutrients and do not require fertilizing with proper mulching and native plant selection. However, some gardeners will opt for small treatments of phosphorus-free liquid fertilizer or till in organic compost to amend the soil. Excess fertilization may lead to weak plant growth, promote disease and pest outbreaks and inhibit soil life. Do not use any pesticides or herbicides. To determine if your garden needs additional fertilizing, we recommend having the soil tested. The University of Minnesota does this for a nominal fee and they provide you with recommendations for supplementing your soils. See <http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu> and you will find the form for gardens under Quick Links. Follow the instructions on the form, submit your sample, and receive your recommendations in about 2 weeks.

Weeding

Weeding will be required throughout the first couple growing seasons, and less frequently after that depending on the variety and persistence of the weeds. After a couple of years the native grasses, sedges and wildflowers will usually out-compete the weeds. Mid-May is an optimal time to get rid of spring weeds like dandelions and late June or July for summer weeds like crabgrass.

Removing Dead Plant Materials and Pruning

In the fall, after the growing season, tall grasses, wildflower seed heads and berries can be left for winter wildlife cover and bird food. Each spring cut dead vegetation a few inches above the soil and prune perennial plants and shrubs that are getting too large or unruly. Dead plant material can be composted or disposed of with your other yard waste. Late summer is a good time to inspect for dead plants, replace as needed. The best times to replant are early to mid-fall and early to mid-

spring. Most of the plants selected for the garden are fairly disease resistant. Prevention is an important strategy in handling disease. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between disease, nutrient deficiency, and insect damage. To prevent disease:

1. Remove dead and diseased plant material from the garden.
2. Keep weeds to a minimum.
3. Minimize stress to plants by making sure they have adequate water and nutrients.
4. During extended dry periods water early in the day, just enough to soak the ground.

Sediment and Debris

Leaves, trash, sediment and other debris that may get into the rain garden should be removed as it accumulates. Sediment can clog the soil mix and slow drainage. Keep inlet pipes and areas clear of sediment and other blockages.

Snow Removal

Snow removal is not necessary; however large amounts of heavy plowed snow can knock down vegetation reducing winter wildlife benefits and should be avoided if possible. Rainwater gardens do not typically freeze as deep as regular ground and keeping inlets free of ice and snow will allow early infiltration. Road salts typically will flush through the soil prior to plant growth and not cause any salt related plant damage. Unless required for safety reasons, avoid excessive de-icing near rainwater garden inlets areas.

Season

Activity



Remove excess leaves
Inspect for dead plants; replace as needed
Leave vegetation for wildlife cover and seed heads/berries for food



Avoid excessive use of de-icing chemicals near rain water garden inlet areas
Avoid piling or plowing excess snow into rain water garden
Keep inlets open and free of ice and snow blockage



Prune dead vegetation and woody plants that are getting too large
Remove sediment, leaves, maple tree seeds and other debris that may block inlets
Weed for spring weeds like dandelions
Check mulch layer and add mulch as needed



Weed for summer weeds like crabgrass
Water during extended drought periods

Monthly (as needed)

Remove trash
Keep inlets pipes clean

For more information contact: Bloomington's website: <http://www.BloomingtonMN.gov>, Keyword "Rainwater Garden"