



Maintaining your Rain Water Garden

Rain 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 garden.

Mulching

Mulching retains moisture, prevents erosion, control weeds, replenishes the organic material in the soil and improves infiltration. Every year check the mulch layer and, if needed, add shredded hardwood mulch to maintain a layer of 2-3 inches thick. Some gardeners prefer to mix in compost with the mulch. This can be done any time of year, but protecting the soil during dry summer periods is especially beneficial.

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 do not require fertilizing with proper mulching and native plant selection. However, some gardeners will opt for small treatments of phosphorus-free liquid fertilizer, do not apply if heavy rain is anticipated. Do not use any pesticides or herbicides.

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 and late June or July are optimal times to get rid of spring weeds like dandelions and summer weeds like crabgrass.

Removing Dead Plant Materials and Pruning

In the fall, after the growing season, tall grasses and wildflower seed heads can be left for winter wildlife cover and bird food. Woody shrubs can be pruned in the fall or winter. Each spring cut dead vegetation a few inches above the soil and prune perennial plants that are getting too large or unruly. Dead plant material can be composted or disposed of with your other yard waste.

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. To minimize this, City Maintenance Crews will clean sediment from the inlet structures after spring and fall street sweeping activities.

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