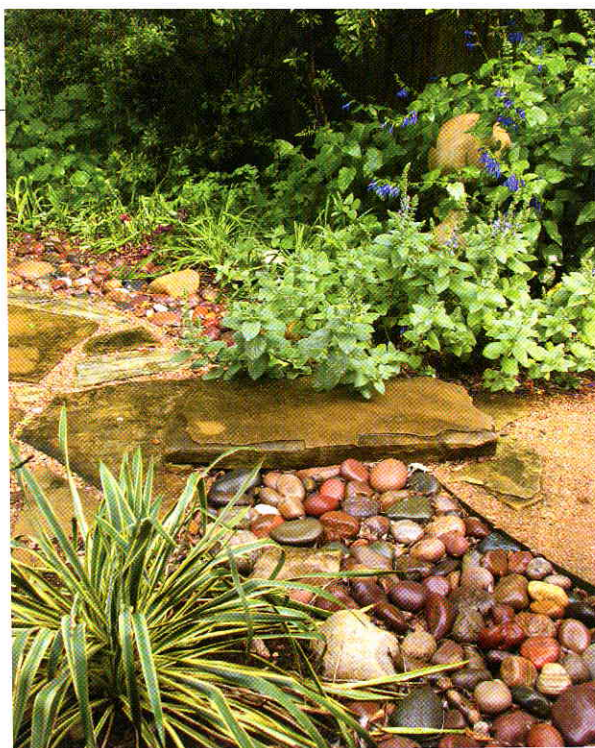


Right as rain

Rain gardens beautify landscapes and reduce pollution **BY BILL BLACKSTON**



Pamela Penick



Pamela Penick

Imagine stepping outside to fetch the morning paper just in time to witness a blue heron lift itself gracefully into the air from your rain garden. It's more likely than you might think. Your decision to build a rain garden to absorb water runoff from roofs, driveways, and lawns not only benefits the environment but can help diverse wildlife thrive, potentially opening up your yard to a feast of visual pleasures.

With a mature rain garden in place, you'll want to turn off the television on a warm summer evening and delight in the spectacle of visiting birds, frogs, dragonflies, swallowtail and monarch butterflies, and (after dark) fireflies that will be drawn to plants that thrive in a moist environment.

Rain gardens have been around for about 15 years, gaining popularity more quickly in the Midwest and West. They are shallow generally flat-bottomed depressions designed to collect rainwater and allow selected plants, bacteria, and soils to naturally filter and remove pollutants from the water as it soaks into the ground.

The term "pollution" for most folks conjures

Clockwise from top: Detail from an Austin, Texas, rain garden; two views of a rain garden created by Wenk & Associates of Denver, Colorado; Water-loving dragonflies are a common sight in rain gardens.



Courtesy of Wenk Associates, Inc.



Courtesy of Wenk Associates, Inc.

images of big factory smoke stacks and large pipes draining unsavory or dangerous chemicals into a river. By definition, this is called a "point source," and, for the most part, regulating agencies such as the state Department of Health and Environmental Control keep a very tight handle on what is released into our water systems.

However, now we have to be concerned about another type of threat, called "Nonpoint Source" pollution, meaning that it comes from many different locations across the landscape. The federal Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the No. 1 source of surface water pollution is caused by stormwater runoff, which accounts for an estimated 80 percent of all surface water contamination. In fact, storm water runoff has polluted nearly 40 percent of U.S. water bodies.

Because we live in a fast-growing state and region, our issues are compounded by the fact that the more development we experience, the more impermeable surfaces are created. Those surfaces include roads, rooftops, parking lots, driveways and so on. The idea is basically that you take a piece of natural land that has the ability to let stormwater permeate or infiltrate into the soil and clean itself of both natural and man-made pollutants. These pollutants might include everyday things such as soil, pet waste, pesticides, fertilizer, oil and grease, leaves, litter, and other potential pollutants. Once you put a cap on the land, you alter things like water speed, quantity, and quality. Compared with conventional urban landscapes, rain gardens allow an estimated 30 percent more water to soak into the ground.

It doesn't take a heavy rainstorm to send pollutants rushing toward streams, wetlands, lakes, and oceans; a single garden hose can supply enough water. Many people think that the water running into street drains and culverts is remediated at some mysterious treatment plant. This simply is not true. It may run downhill and be collected in a detention pond, but it still must be cleaned, with pollutants removed at some point and disposed of properly.

We all are part of the problem when it comes to stormwater runoff. Continued growth and development are only going to create more impermeable surfaces that cause more pollutants to move off the landscape quickly.

THE SECRET TO GREAT ENTERTAINING IS GREAT ENTERTAINMENT.



Live music turns an ordinary party into a major social event. The Yamaha Disklavier piano plays every nuance of the artists' original performance and it is recreated, right down to the moving keys and pedals, right there in your living room. To find out more about the Disklavier come to Hannah Piano Company in the Seven Oaks Shopping Center or visit our website at www.hannahpiano.com.

All Player Pianos On Sale Now at Hannah Piano



CREATING 'KANDO' TOGETHER

YAMAHA disklavier® PianoSoft™ Plus
Media



**HANNAH
PIANO COMPANY**

Sales & Service • Financing • Music Lessons

798-7077 or 1-800-798-5095
6169 ST. ANDREWS RD.
SEVEN OAKS SHOPPING CENTER
(between Zorba's and K Mart)

www.hannahpiano.com



the soil and plants naturally to remove pollutants from the water system. The plants can use nitrogen and phosphorus for growth. In cases involving organic material, such as compost, microbes generate usable nutrients for plants.

There is much to consider in planning a rain garden - things such as downhill slope and the soil's ability to percolate water. How much water a rain garden must handle and, of course, the types of plants you select for it will help determine the size and layout of the rain garden.

On average, residential rain gardens occupy from 150 to 500 square feet and are located at the lowest elevation in the yard. They should be constructed at least 10-20 feet away from a home's foundation and never be located over a septic tank. You'll want to locate your garden somewhere in the vicinity of a downspout or sump pump. Or you can direct water to your garden by digging a trench in which you may put plastic piping or making a natural swale to guide the water.

Most rain gardens are 3 to 6 inches in depth but vary based on the absorption rate of the soil. Slow-draining clay soils may call for a shallower garden and may pond for a day or two after a heavy rain. Sandy soils that readily suck up water can necessitate deeper ground penetration, as much as 1 or 2 feet. The bottom of the depressed garden should be kept fairly flat so the water can spread out.

Don't be afraid of mosquitoes; most rain gardens don't pool water long enough for them to spawn. In addition, dragonflies and other creatures love to feast on mosquitos and will keep their presence under control.

If you have especially poor drainage

The Wedgwood House (top right) in rain-prone Seattle, Washington, is a trailblazing example of green design. The home features a rain garden beneath its exterior staircase that catches water runoff from the home's roof.

Photos on this page courtesy of Marshall Rose Architect, LLC



Seasoned gardeners already know how to build and beautify the landscape. But if you have the correct slope of land, you can create a rain garden from a depressed area in the soil that collects water from significant rain events. (If you want to impress your academic friends, call your rain garden a "bioretention cell.")

In addition to being a functioning filter to cleanse stormwater as it is slowly

reabsorbed into the water table, rain gardens can be beautified with purposeful grasses and distinctive plants, creating praiseworthy displays you won't feel compelled to hide with fencing or other means.

Some of you already may have these locations in your yard that may be simply turf (known as grass swales). All can and do infiltrate rain from storm events and, therefore, slow water movement, allowing

conditions, you can increase the permeability of your soil by adding compost or mulch to it and choosing highly water-tolerant plants. Experts recommend using hardy, native plants. A number of ornamental grasses that thrive in rain gardens include sweetgrass, switch grass, and river oats. Deciduous shrubs, including witch alder, swamp rose, winterberry, beautyberry, and possumhaw should do well. Evergreen shrubs recommended for rain gardens include anise shrub, wax myrtle, and dwarf palmetto. Ferns, from Southern Lady to marsh fern, also are a great choice.

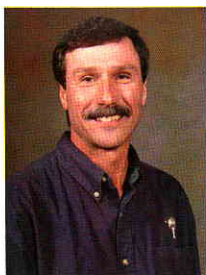
You can add color to your rain garden with a number of perennials, including swamp sunflower, black-eyed Susan, goldenrod, dogtooth daisy, wild bergamot, ironweed, blue flag iris, and verbena. Trees of all sizes recommended for rain gardens, so long as they don't provide too much shade, include red buckeye, ironwood, river birch, red maple, black gum, willow oak, pond cypress, red cedar, and even southern magnolia.

Depending on your personal taste, it's best to select a variety of heights, shapes, colors, and textures in plants and to try and compose a mix that will bloom at different times throughout the year. As with any garden, the rain garden will require weeding and attention with regard to basic upkeep.

Rain gardens are a great tool for landowners to help clean up the environment and should be utilized in the landscape wherever practical. However, before even experienced gardeners run out and start digging holes in their lawns or flowerbeds, they are advised to do their homework. There are some great Web sites and blogs on rain gardens; all you need do is "Google" the term. Extension services historically are a reliable source of research-based information.

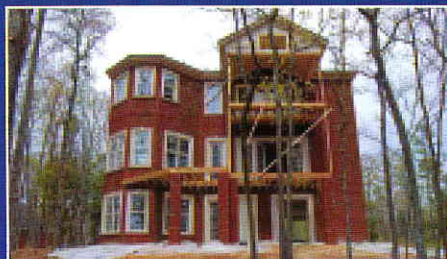
How well we take care of the water runoff as it moves downhill into the streams, lakes, and rivers on its trip to the ocean determines what the quality of our water system is now and for future generations.

Remember, only rain water should go in the storm drain, and "we all live downstream." **LMC**



Blackston is County Agent Emeritus, Area Watershed Agent for Water Quality, with the Clemson Extension Service in Lexington.

THE TODD BECKSTROM ALL-STAR TEAM



SUNSET SPLENDOR

Experience sweeping big water views from your magnificent point lot. Enter the oversized 3 car garage and a mahogany elevator takes you to rustic cherry floors, Viking kitchen, 5 granite bathrooms, and 5 huge bedrooms each with walk-in closets and private baths. Owner/agent.



ONE LEVEL LAKE HOME

Nestled on a .77 acre manicured lot with year around water, this 3BD/2.5BA home is a dream come true! It needs nothing with the gourmet kitchen with quartz counters, the master suite with sitting area, lakefront sunroom, 1,100 sf workshop underneath, private dock, boat lift & jet port. Only \$634,800.



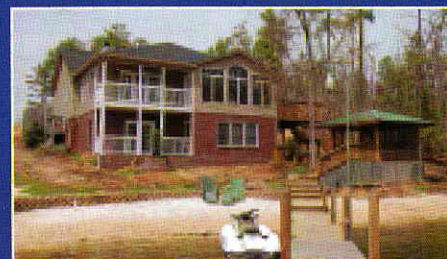
TIMBERLAKE LIVING

Whether you prefer boating on beautiful Lake Murray or golfing on a Willard Byrd-designed masterpiece, this all-brick lakefront home has a spectacular view and deep water. Bright, open floor plan, custom tile work, solid surface, and more make this 3BD/2.5BA show-place a must see! Offered at only \$589,900.



SOUTHERN CHARM

This updated 5BD/3.5BA lake home is a real head turner! Huge wrap around porches, immaculate landscaping, and excellent lake views draw you in; granite, hardwood floors, new lighting, beautiful colors, molding, built-ins and MORE keep you there. Offered for \$589,777. "Talk to Todd!" at 348-0148.



LAKEFRONT DELIGHT

This newly remodeled 4BD/3BA lakefront home has deep water on a protected cove and all the extras you desire with a granite kitchen, stainless appliances, hand scraped hardwood floors, 2 master suites, lakefront gazebo, sandy beach and much more! Available for under \$535,000.



WATERFRONT TRANQUILITY

Enjoy the lake year around with deep water at your private dock. A double lot allows you peace while enjoying your huge view from this one level 3BD/3BA A-frame home. Relax in the hot tub, entertain on the large deck, schmooze around the wet bar, or cozy up to the fireplace. All this and MORE awaits you! Offered for \$625,290. "Talk to Todd!" at 348-0148.

WANT A DEAL?

TALK TO TODD! AT 348-0148 TODAY TO FIND OUT WHERE THE BEST DEALS ARE!

Todd Conroy,
Realtor
Buyer's Specialist
803-446-2245

Karin Follette
Administrative
Manager
803-345-6713

Todd Beckstrom,
Realtor
ABR, CRS, Broker
803-348-0148



www.toddbeckstrom.com

