

Responding to common questions about rain gardens

I have heard that rain gardens have standing water. That sounds like a health hazard! What if a small child or elderly person fell in there?

Here in the Northwest, we're used to rain and puddles. Rain gardens are designed to divert rainfall, preventing puddles elsewhere and keeping basements from flooding. They absorb water in less than a day. If it rains several days in a row, it is possible that your rain garden may have a shallow puddle until the rain stops and the water has time to soak in.

Do rain gardens breed mosquitoes?

No. Because rain gardens are shallow and are only built with absorbent soils, they are designed to dry out before mosquitoes can reproduce.

If this rain garden is filtering pollution, then all the pollution will end up in the ground. I don't want all those toxics in my yard, or polluting the groundwater and the local well!

Rest easy. The plants and soil in the rain garden absorb and process any toxins in the runoff, naturally filtering rainfall before it gets into the water supply. It is a tiny amount per rain garden and poses no health threat. Most of the toxins in runoff come from water running down the street. Since your rain garden filters water off your roof and driveway, far fewer toxins have accumulated than if it were running down the street.

I don't have anything against rain gardens, but I'm not interested if it means losing any parking spots.

Like any neighborhood amenity, with rain gardens we make a tradeoff. While parking losses are minimized, one parking spot is exchanged for a lovely roadside rain garden, which beautifies the neighborhood while slowing down traffic to make a safer place for kids to play and people to walk or ride bikes.

I'm pretty bad at gardening. Do rain gardens require a lot of maintenance?

Not at all, although rain gardens are like any other garden in that they need some maintenance to perform well and look good. You should add mulch every year to control weeds and replenish organic material in the soil. During the summer months, you should water every 2-4 days for the first year, and every 4-7 days for the second year. Rain gardens with native plants should require little to no watering after the first two or three years. You can learn more about maintaining your rain garden from the maintenance guide available on the Stewardship Partners website.

Sure, they look pretty. But do rain gardens prevent flooding?

Rain gardens act like a native forest by collecting, absorbing and filtering rainwater that runs off roof tops, driveways, patios and other areas that don't allow water to soak in. Instead of rainwater puddling on your property, a rain garden captures channeled rain in a shallow bowl in the ground, and filters the water on-site, removing any oil, fertilizer, pesticides or other pollutants that would otherwise be dumped in the sewer.