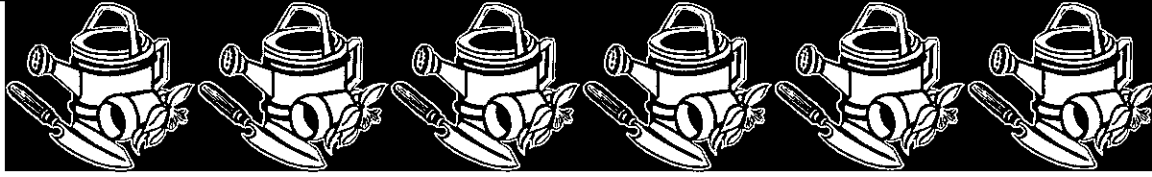


Wenke Wisdom



Rain Gardens

You may not know one when you see one. It appears to be your basic wildflower garden with a mix of familiar black-eyed Susans, purple coneflowers, monarda and grasses. Rain gardens trap runoff, filter water and look lovely. It is a flood-preventing, water-filtering, pollution-cleaning, well-charging, bird-feeding, butterfly-attracting machine.

Rain gardens are areas that have been dug up and retrofitted with well-drained soil, topped with about 6 inches of mulch. They're located where rainwater drains, graded like shallow saucers, and planted with plants that don't mind occasional "wet feet". What they do is direct water into an area where it can soak into the ground. Water going back into the ground replenishes the water table. Going through the plants and through the ground cleans the water; it's a biological way of filtering water. Rain gardens also lessen flooding. They're attractive; attract birds, butterflies and hummingbirds.

Rain gardens basically do what forest floors do in nature – capture rain instead of letting it run off. Unlike deeper, grassed detention ponds common in housing developments, rain gardens are only 6" deep at their deepest point. They're built so that rainwater soaks in within a day (usually within a few hours), eliminating mosquito and other standing-water concerns.

Formula for the soil is:

- Excavate soil to a depth of about 18" and mix it with half sand. If your soil is sandy-loam, it is not necessary to add the sand
- Fill hole with about a foot of topsoil heavily amended with compost or decayed leaves
- Next layer, add 4 to 6" of mulch
- Remaining topsoil can be used to build a small berm around the perimeter

All-native plants are used, that way no extra care is needed. Drier-soil species are planted around and closest to the perimeter; such as purple coneflowers, creeping sedum, creeping phlox, wild blue indigo, low-bush cranberries and switchgrass.

Towards the middle where the garden will stay wetter longer, damp-tolerant species were used. These include great blue lobelia, swamp milkweed, New England aster, goldenrod and blazing star. If you have a hill where you build your rain garden, you can break the rush of water during heavy rains by laying a pair of rock channels in the hill. These turn into small cascading waterfalls when it rains. A small rock spillway can be added at the far end of the garden, in case there's so much water that it doesn't drain fast enough.

Rain gardens can be added to any home landscape to keep rainwater on your property while adding colorful and wildlife-friendly plantings in place of lawn. Two logical spots on most home lots: where water is draining out of down spouts and where water is running off paved surfaces such as driveways and patios.

For more information see reverse side of page

Rain Garden Continued

For details on rain gardens and how to build them:

- The Rain Gardens of West Michigan Web site is at www.raingardens.org
- The Rain Garden Network Web site is at www.raingardennetwork.com
- You can click on google.com and type in “rain garden”. You will find multiple websites and receive a wealth of information.

Corner of Market Street & Sprinkle Road

Wenke Greenhouses

269-388-2266