Once upon a time there were natural depressions in the meadows and forests where excess rainwater would pool up. The water would slowly soak into the ground, be filtered by plant roots and soil layers, and recharge the aquifer below with clean water.

Then along came man and civilization with non-porous surfaces that would not allow the infiltration of rainwater. Polluted water ended up as runoff in streams and retention ponds, and the level of clean water in the aquifers declined.

But concerned citizens everywhere began to mimic nature by building Rain Gardens. Rainwater could once again make its way back into aquifers, cleaned and refreshed.

Native Plants work well in the Rain Garden. Many tolerate periods of heavy rain and drought.
What is a Rain Garden?

A Rain Garden is not a new concept, but it is one that is gaining popularity in our Florida home landscapes. It consists of a small depression or swale in the yard or garden that collects excess rainwater for a short period of time. Water can soak naturally into the ground. As it filters down, it is cleaned by soil and plant activity so that clean water enters and recharges the aquifer below.

Where to Place a Rain Garden

The goal is to mimic a natural depression that will hold excess rain water for a few hours until it can soak in. Figure out where most of your excess rainwater is running during a heavy rain. It would be reasonable to choose a nearby location for your rain garden, if possible.

You may need to be creative to redirect the flow of water into your depression. Use small channels and berms to guide the flow. Place them in the lawn or directly in existing beds.

How to Make the Rain Garden

The size of your garden will depend on how much runoff you have to intercept. Two or three well placed small depressions will work just as well as a larger one. The rain garden should be 8 to 10 inches deep, with a two inch layer of mulch.

If you dig into clayey backfill, take it out and replace it with sandy soil. Water needs to be able to soak in quickly, usually within several hours.

Native Plants can take on our rainy months, and can even tolerate an occasional drought.

(They’ve had centuries of practice)

Plants for the Rain Garden

Most rain gardens are planted with native plants to help stabilize the soil and help remove pollutants.

Look for natives that like moist soil but tolerate dry spells. Consider blue-eyed grass, muhly grass, Florida bluebell, common tickseed and Stokes aster. Larger shrubs and trees can be used for larger rain gardens. But water during dry spells for the first year.

You can even go ‘plantless’ for the dry riverbed look. Just use rocks instead of plants.

Find more plants at these sites: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep011
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep061 www.solutionsforyourlife.com

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