Rain Gardens

What is a rain garden?
A rain garden is a shallow depression in the landscape planted with plants that are both drought and moisture tolerant, including wildflowers, grasses and shrubs. Native plants are important to include because they are adapted to the local ecosystem and tend to have deeper roots. Rain gardens are designed to be the receptors of the rain from impervious surfaces, such as: rooftops, driveways, sidewalks, patios and roads. They are designed to be aesthetically appealing, while minimizing a significant environmental problem—water run off.

Rain Garden Functions
The primary function of a rain garden is to intercept, trap and treat rainwater before it can run off—we want it to infiltrate the ground. Runoff may include pollutants from lawns and impervious surfaces including leaves, de-icing salts, lawn fertilizers and herbicides, automotive fluids and more. Rain gardens can reduce the load of nutrients (phosphorus and nitrogen) entering our surface waters.

Sample Plant List
Wet zone:
- Wild bergamot
- Marsh milkweed
- Turtle Head
- Marsh Marigold
- Ferns
- American Cranberry

- Giant Hyssop
- Cardinal Flower
- Sneezeweed
- Great blue lobelia
- Red-osier dogwood

Upland Zone:
- Blue vervain
- Monarda (Bee Balm)
- Grass leaf goldenrod
- Joe pye weed
- Bottlebrush sedge

- Black-eyed Susan
- Coneflowers
- Golden Alexander
- Astilbe
- Little bluestem grass

Where should I locate my rain garden?
Position a rain garden where it can intercept the most runoff from hard surfaces. Notice the location of your down spouts, where water runs off the driveway and the topography of the landscape. Is there a spot in your yard where you can maximize rain collection? To prevent damage to house foundations, it is recommended that it be located at least 10 feet away.

Ask your local zoning office about setbacks.

Sources and for more information:
University of Wisconsin Extension Service and DNR: http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/wm/nps/rp/games.htm
MPCA Plants for Stormwater Design: http://www.pca.state.mn.us
Duluth Streams Organization http://www.duluthstreams.org/citizen/wet_garden.html
Metropolitan Council Rain Garden http://www.metrocouncil.org/directions/water/water2006/raingardensApr06.htm