

Professional Rain Garden Maintenance

This is a guide for Professional Landscapers who maintain rain gardens for clients.

General Maintenance Care

- *Watering:* For the first three weeks after planting, water the rain garden once per week. It is not necessary to water during a given week if one–inch of rain accumulates. Water the garden during drought periods in mid-summer, if needed.
- *Weeding:* Using a field guide, identify what is a weed versus what is a rain garden plant. Removed identified weeds. TIP: You may want to mark rain garden plants with small planting stakes until they are established.
- *Mulch:* Until the rain garden plants are established, mulching the edge / slope of the rain garden interior will discourage weed growth and soil erosion.
- *Sedimentation:* It is always best to protect the garden from the possibility of silt entering the garden! Be diligent, conditions change! But if a rain garden does have sediment build up, an easy remedy is to dig small pits in the garden and remove the soil. Over time these will naturally fill in and the plants grow over. This is less invasive than trying to skim off larger areas, and disturbs the plant community less. In severe cases it may be necessary to re dig the basin.

Aesthetic Maintenance Considerations

- Depending on your clients' aesthetic preference, rain gardens can be aggressively maintained or left to form a dynamic ecological community on its' own.
- Traditional deadheading may encourage more flower production, but leaving the spent flowerheads provides winter food to birds. Consider leaving flower heads until spring.
- Leave the plant stems up through winter to enjoy their structures and to give the wildlife some cover; it will also benefit the soil by protecting its surface from the weather.
- Early summer height reduction of some of the later flowering tall species will improve the overall appearance of the garden.
- Remove and compost dead vegetation, weeds and tree seedlings.

Maintenance Check List

Monthly

- ~ Inspect rain garden for weeds and remove.
- ~ If plants show signs of drought stress, water deeply for 15 minutes once a week.
- ~ Remove trash and / or pet waste.
- ~ Check for movement of soil within the garden. If this is occurring, install more native plants.
- ~ Check for movement of soil from within the garden to areas outside the garden. If this is occurring, your rain garden may be undersized for the amount of runoff it is attempting to infiltrate. Consider expanding your rain garden.
- ~ Remove and replace diseased or dead plants as needed

Annually

- ~ Maintain 2" of non-dyed hardwood mulch on your rain garden, as it will reduce hardpan formation and help absorb runoff. Add mulch annually as needed. Take care not to bury the root flares of the plants.
- ~ Check for sedimentation. Occasionally use a flat shovel to remove any excess

- ~ Check for signs of erosion around edge of the rain garden. If there are rills or gullies within or adjacent to the rain garden, from the water entrance point, add rocks or stones to break up the flow of the water. If there is erosion out of the rain garden, build up the soil and add plants. Replace rocks that may be diverting flow out of the garden. Build up areas where more protection is needed
- ~ When new growth begins in the spring, cut back dead plant material 2" inches about the ground. Remove and replace dead or diseased plants.
- ~ Fertilizing is not a part of maintaining your rain garden. The garden sustains itself with the help of organic material in the topsoil. Rain gardens are meant to help remove excess nutrients from runoff, and adding fertilizer will contribute to excess nutrient loading. Also, native plants do not require supplemental fertilizer.