

Rain Gardens



Come see the animals in our gardens!



It's a flower bed. It's a pond. It's a bog.

NO!

It's a Rain Garden!

Here is a design feature that combines good looks with improved water quality. Designed to filter, retain, and absorb rain water runoff from the Fountain Plaza, this small garden returns water to the earth rather than sending it down storm drains into the Lafayette River.

Virginia Zoo staff and the Norfolk Master Gardener Water Stewards combined their knowledge and resources to build a rain garden that is both practical and educational. Many hands plus heavy equipment stripped the turf, excavated excess soil, amended the base soil with compost and sand, and installed the plants, mulch, and rocks.

Several rain storms tested the garden's water holding capacity before it was finished. These inspired design changes to better filter the water through more rocks and plants before it reached the overflow storm drains. The rate of water absorption was improved by the use of several plastic pipe and gravel drains in the lowest area of the garden. Two inches of rainfall from the next storm became 12" of water in the garden. It was absorbed in a day and half. No mosquito breeding. No drowned plants. Just right!

Plants for the Rain Garden were selected to blend with the surrounding landscape while surviving the various moisture levels of the garden. We used:

UPPER LEVEL:

- Abelia 'Kaledoscope'
- Pennisetum 'Karly Rose'
- Pennisetum 'Hameln'
- Winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflorum*)
- Yucca 'Color Guard'

Rain Gardens cont.

MIDDLE LEVEL:

- Clethra 'Hummingbird'
- Clethra 'Ruby Spice'
- Elderberry 'Black Lace'
- Pennisetum 'Karly Rose'
- Pennisetum 'Hameln'

LOWER LEVEL:

- Itea 'Henry's Garnet'
- Itea 'Little Henry'

THROUGHOUT:

- Daylily 'Big Time Happy'
- Daylily 'Happy Returns'
- Liriope, variegated
- Panicum 'Northwinds'

The Rain Gardens are located near the Fountain Plaza and the Red Panda exhibit. Panda Exhibit for the spring of 2009.

Websites:

- <http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/raingarden/Building.htm> North Carolina Cooperative Extension information on rain gardens
- http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/raingarden_design/index.htm Rain garden design templates for the Chesapeake Bay area
- http://raingardens.org/docs/Create_A_Rain_Garden.pdf - Michigan site with good, basic information with more northern plant selections