

Keep Your Rain Garden Gorgeous

June 15, 2016

East Columbia Senior Center

Amanda Rockler presentation – see powerpoint

Rachel Beebe presentation – see powerpoint

Q & A Session:

The following points and issues were discussed during the question and answer session:

- It is recommend taking pictures of your garden each season so you can see what was planted and how things have changed over time.
- Landscape fabric and mulch – check that the fabric is not sticking out and replace rocks that have moved.
- You can get reimbursement for more than one project if it treats a different impervious surface.
- Other properties contribute stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces besides residential (malls, parking lots, etc). Even though residential rain gardens are smaller projects, larger projects are also being done by Howard County.
- All new properties after 2003 have stormwater management practices already.
- Amanda Rockler is working with the SeaGrant Law Center to compile a fact sheet and resource list on lot-to-lot drainage issues. If you have issues with drainage coming from another property, you should discuss with the neighbor and see if there is anything they are willing to do. Extension.umd.edu/watershed has a factsheet on this subject.
- Many houses have been designed so that water drains to the front or back. Sometimes these systems can be improved to make them work better.
- Weeds – if the plants that were put in originally did not thrive, some homeowners are happy to keep the weeds that spring up—they are better than nothing. As long as you watch out for invasive plants, it's up to the homeowner. Thistle should be removed.
- Removing weeds helps the plants to thrive.
- Contractors should know what plants will work on each site and do their best to work with the conditions (e.g., sun/shade).
- What if an area next to the rain garden it gets flooded?
 - A dry riverbed might be an option to move a large amount of water. The Howard County Watershed Stewards Academy may be able to help.
 - If there is not an erosion problem and the water percolates into the soil, you should tolerate the temporary flooding as long as it is not affecting foundation, etc. If the water stays on the surface for several days, then a solution might be needed.

- Summer watering is needed during the first summer and may be needed during the second summer, especially if there is a drought. New gardens need an inch per week.
- What plants/shrubs grow better in a rain garden? In the center you need plants that are tolerant of wet roots. Upper, drier area needs something that can take both water and dryness. There is a list of plants on the University of Maryland Extension website, complete with tolerance conditions.
- Turtlehead has taken over one audience member's garden 5 years after the installation. Since rain gardens are relatively small, a lack of diversity is not a problem.
- The first inch of water treated is the most important. Rain gardens are designed for this amount and if there is overflow, it is OK.
- There is also a Howard County program for businesses and non-profit groups including HOA's. Contact Rachel Beebe for more info.
- County incentives do not depend on the location or watershed—all areas (pre-2003) are eligible. The Columbia Association program is limited to certain watersheds but may expand to other areas.
- Rain gardens are not designed to treat all the water on a property.

EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel included Linda Luke, Lori Lilly, John McCoy, Lauren Turner, and Jill Crane (homeowner).

Rachel asked the following questions; the panelists' answers are below.

Linda Luke: President of Village Gardeners, a local landscaping company which has installed many rain gardens.

Lori Lilly: Project Manager of Restoring the Environment and Developing Youth (READY); this group has treated 10 acres of impervious surface, mostly through work with HOAs and religious institutions.

Lauren Turner: Owner of Lauren's Garden Service; her company has installed several rain gardens.

John McCoy: Columbia Association Watershed Manager

Jill Crane: Homeowner with a rain garden. She has participated in both the Columbia Association rain garden program and the Howard County CleanScapes (stormwater landscaping incentives) program.

- 1) What are the most common maintenance mistakes?
 - Plants in spring can be mistaken for weeds. Recommended that you send pictures and they can label which are the weeds that need to be removed.
 - Mulching either too much or too little.
 - Erosion on the berms may need repairs if the garden design needs to be tweaked.
 - Sediment that settles on a rain garden can prevent water from draining.
 - Do not overthink it: it's a garden for your enjoyment and you can experiment with plant material.

2) What works for deer protection?

- Sprays are a constant maintenance issue. Deer Off has longer term ones that come on a stick that you can buy at home stores—it works for about 4 months.
- There are home-made recipes – mothballs, hang soaps, garlic powder.
- John McCoy provided a recipe using eggs, Frank’s Hot sauce and garlic powder. Sprays it on plants.
 - Choose plants that are deer resistant.
 - Once established, plants will take hold and become harder for deer to remove.
 - Liquid fence works but you have to keep spraying after storms, etc.
 - Motion detector sprinklers also work.

3) Are there natural or less harmful pesticides?

- Linda likes Roundup foam on an applicator. It does not travel in the groundwater. They can also be hired \$300-350 to hand pull weeds and add mulch (village gardeners). READY and Lauren’s Garden Service also offer pay services.
 - One audience member suggested reading up on Roundup – that it is not harmless as claimed.

4) What are the most common rain garden complaints?

- Mulch that moves and berms that do not keep the water in the garden.
 - A new technique to prevent mulch movement: place river rock in the middle of the garden to take care of drifting of mulch and moving of soil. You can add river rock to the outlet also.
- Designers do their best to gauge the site. Residents should feel free to add their own plants after the original installation. The fuller the garden is, the better.

5) What maintenance should be done?

- Mulch spring and fall.
 - Or mulch once per year – not too thick so that it clogs up the system, but enough to keep down the weeds.

- In the fall: leave some plants up for the birds. Perennials should be cut back some time before the start of the next growing season.
 - You can leave shrubs alone: no need to cut back.
 - Rocks can be cleaned manually – lift them up and clean around them.
- 6) What is an acceptable plant mortality rate?
- Watering can be an issue – too much or too little. If it declines within the first 2-3 months, contact your contractor early rather than later. Even the best plan doesn't guarantee the success of all the plants. Sometimes you need to try a different plant. Less than 5% mortality rate is expected if everything goes well.
 - After all the digging is done, that is the hard work. Replacing plants is easy.

For Jill, the homeowner:

- 7) What is your maintenance routine? Is it worth it to have the rain garden?
- Folds in with other yard work.
 - Spring – remove weeds
 - Summer pinch back some plants
 - Fall leave plants alone, remove leaves
 - It takes 15 minutes a week or less.
 - Yes, it is worth it to have the rain garden.
 - The yard used to be muddy and eroding around the gutters and used to flood neighbor's yard. The flooding no longer happens.
 - Her favorite part is that she can enjoy it from her window.
- 8) Is there anything you wish you had known?
- Would have had the nearby tree trimmed first. Removing the branches provided more sun.

Expert Panel Q and A:

- Shade gardens are a challenge for color. Look to foliage for color. Foam flower (tiarella) can work well. Bleeding heart provides color in spring.
- Weeds – you can leave them in there if you want to. Don't let thistle grow – it's considered a noxious weed. Clip it off very close to the bottom, paint with stump and vine killer. Cutting it down by itself can be very effective. Rhizome spreaders shouldn't be dug out, they can spread more quickly.

- Tubing under the ground – will it clog? Try to keep sediment away from the front and end of the tube.