



When it rains, it drains: Rain gardens have vast benefits

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Over the course of a few summer Saturdays and thanks to many hardworking volunteers, our chapter has built a rain garden on the site of the Malcolm House in Jericho. The Malcolm House is a historic building that currently houses the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District. Thanks to the efforts of Megan Bove (chair of the emerging professionals committee) and the instruction by Brian Zimmerman (director, NCSWCD) we each were able to feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment for a job well done.

Rain gardens are where form meets function and the gutter meets the ground. Simply put, rain gardens are gardens that are specifically designed to soak up rain water, mainly from roofs, but also from driveways and patios. Rain gardens look like regular flower gardens but they are more. When it rains, a rain garden fills with a few inches of water and allows the water to slowly filter into the ground rather than running off to the storm drains. Compared to a patch of lawn, rain gardens allow about 30% more water to soak into the ground! They also add beauty to neighborhoods.

In the simplest terms, the best environmental benefit of rain gardens is that it returns rain water to the ground, recharging ground water and aquifers, and eliminating storm water run-off.

Rain gardens are a tremendous help in providing first flush pollution control and storm water management. By allowing the first flush of rainfall to percolate into the ground, any pollutants are naturally treated via the soil chemistry. Since all of the rainwater passes into the ground, the runoff from paved areas is reduced, which in turn may reduce the need for separate storm water retention ponds and allow for using smaller capacity storm sewers. It also acts as a natural filter and can reduce pollutants from entering streams, ponds and rivers.

Given the many recent occurrences of significant street flooding from what would otherwise seem to be a rather ordinary rainfall, maybe more building sites should be considering adding a rain garden. To that end we hope that this rain garden will serve to educate many interested students, builders and developers alike as an example and instrument for change so that when it rains, it drains.

Vince Capogna, LEED AP ID+C, GPRO: O&M, CM, is the executive director of the Long Island Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council and principal of Synergy Green Building Group, Inc., New Hyde Park, N.Y.

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