

# MAKING WAVES

## Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign: Landscaping for Cleaner Water

By Laura Whalen, Restoration Specialist, Partnership for the Delaware Estuary

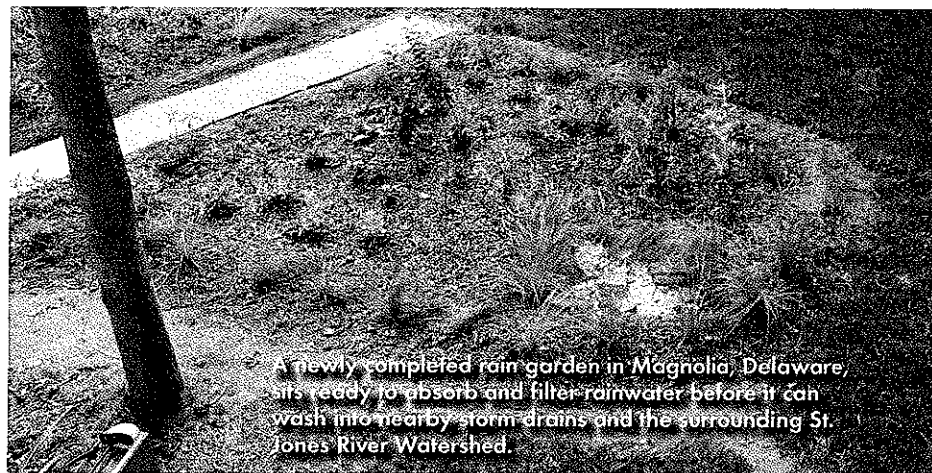
In recent months with the troubled economy, it seems like everyone is trying to think "green" and figure out ways to save or reuse resources that were once thrown away. Rain water, or stormwater, is one of those resources that is often thrown away by sending it down storm drains as quickly as possible without utilizing its benefits. Rain gardens are a good way everyone can save some of that stormwater instead of throwing it away, and rain gardens offer an additional benefit by also helping to clean stormwater before it enters our groundwater and waterways.

Stormwater runoff and flooding are top concerns in the Delaware Estuary because of the damage that can occur when large volumes of rainwater rush off rooftops, driveways, streets, and other impervious surfaces, through storm-drain pipes, and directly into our streams, rivers, and bays, causing severe erosion and destroying habitat. This stormwater also carries many pollutants into streams, which are picked up from impervious surfaces. Rain gardens provide an easy, low-cost way to manage some of these issues in our own backyards while also improving water quality in the Delaware Estuary.

### What is a rain garden and how can it help our bays?

According to the Low Impact Development Center, a leading organization in land planning and water quality research, a rain garden is "a garden which takes advantage of rainfall and stormwater runoff in its design and plant selection." Usually it is a small garden which is designed to withstand the extremes of moisture and concentrations of nutrients, particularly the nitrogen and phosphorus that are found in polluted runoff.

Rain gardens are ideally located close to the source of runoff, such as a downspout or connected to a rain barrel, and serve to slow the stormwater as it travels downhill. This gives the stormwater more time to infiltrate



A newly completed rain garden in Magnolia, Delaware, sits ready to absorb and filter rainwater before it can wash into nearby storm drains and the surrounding St. Jones River Watershed.

and less opportunity to gain momentum and erosive power. The Low Impact Development Center is a great resource for learning more about rain gardens, including various designs, what plants to use, and the best location in your yard. Check out their website for more information at [www.LowImpactDevelopment.org/RainGarden\\_Design](http://www.LowImpactDevelopment.org/RainGarden_Design). The Low Impact Development Center will also be hosting a new website for the Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Region 3 office is promoting the Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign through its three National Estuary Programs in the region: the Center for Inland Bays, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program, and the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. The idea came from the 10,000 Rain Gardens Campaign in Kansas City, which was an initiative to establish the Kansas City area as a leader in water quality protection. The Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign has goals similar to the Kansas City campaign: to educate the public about rain gardens and other stormwater solutions, and to improve water quality in the Delaware Estuary, Delaware Inland Bays, and Maryland Coastal Bays.

Other partners involved in the Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign include the:

- Delaware Nature Society
- Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Watershed Assessment Division
- Sussex County Conservation District
- University of Delaware Cooperative Extension
- University of Delaware Sea Grant Program

In May, the Center for the Inland Bays launched their part of the campaign, called "1,000 Rain Gardens for the Inland Bays," with several workshops on rain gardens and native plants. The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary's campaign will also kick off this year with a rain garden installation at a high school in the Estuary. The remainder of the campaign is currently being finalized with the EPA and other partners, so please stay tuned for more details.

For information about the Rain Gardens for the Bays Campaign, or to become a partner, please contact Laura Whalen at (800) 445-4935, extension 107, or [LWhalen@DelawareEstuary.org](mailto:LWhalen@DelawareEstuary.org).