

What is a rain garden?

A rain garden is a shallow, vegetated depression designed to absorb and filter runoff from hard (impervious) surfaces like roofs, sidewalks, and driveways. Rain gardens are usually planted with colorful native plants and grasses. They not only provide an attractive addition to the yard, but also help to conserve water and protect our water quality.

How does a rain garden help?

As Austin becomes increasingly urbanized, native landscapes are replaced with impervious surfaces that prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground. Stormwater quickly runs off these hard surfaces, picking up any pollutants from the land and carrying them to our creeks. This rapidly flowing water also increases the chances of flooding and erosion. The goal of a rain garden is to keep water on the land. Rain gardens, with their shallow depressions, capture stormwater and provide for natural infiltration into the soil. This provides water for the plants and helps maintain a constant flow of water in our streams through groundwater. They also help filter out pollutants including fertilizers, pesticides, oil, heavy metals and other chemicals that would otherwise reach our creeks through storm drains or drainage ditches. By reducing the quantity of water that runs off your property, rain gardens help lower the risk of flooding and erosion.

Six easy steps to create a rain garden

1. Find the Right Location: Observe water flow from hard surface such as roof; place rain garden where water collects. Select area on gently sloping or flat land. Verify slope of lawn (should be < 10%). Try to pick spot in full - partial sun. Shady spots work but attractive plant choices limited. Make sure overflow doesn't runoff to neighbor's yard. If experiencing drainage-related problems), consider placing rain garden at least 10' from structure. Avoid utility lines; call 1-800-344-8377 to locate underground utilities. **2. Test the Soil:** With soil saturated, dig hole 6" wide x 12" deep in area for garden. (*Ideally, at least the 12" of soil above bedrock*). Insert ruler & fill hole with water to 6" mark. Time how long takes water to absorb into ground; should absorb in < 24 hrs. If water still in hole after 24 hrs, then site not suitable for garden. If soils meet test requirements, then ready to build! **3. Calculate the Size and Shape of Your Garden:** Find roof area or other impervious surface that will contribute runoff to garden. Use tape measure to estimate size of area. Standing on ground, measure area interested in (area taken up by house if looking down from above). Once estimated length & width, multiply two measurements to get area of impervious surface in sq. ft. **4. Rain Garden Construction:** Once confident in location, lay out shape using string or tape. If yard fairly level, dig out 6" deep. If yard on gentle slope, may need to dig soil from upslope to build small berm (mound of compacted soil) at downslope side. Keep 6" depth thru-out bottom of garden. Slope sides of garden using shovel to create gentle side slope. Level top border of basin. Use top of existing lawn, earthen berm or landscaping material. Will distribute overflow evenly across perimeter of garden. Loosen soil in bottom of garden to 3" deep. Top dress loosened soil with compost so soil ready for planting. If water flows quickly into garden, will need to construct "splash pad" to guide water to garden. Splash pads typically constructed with rock & extend 2 to 3' from point of entry. 1 - 2" gravel or river rock often sufficient size for splash pads. **5. Plant Selection & Installation:** Select plants with well-established root system. Deep-rooted plants like native bunch grasses absorb most pollutants & help soil hold more water. Even though get lots water after rain, drought tolerant plants best choice in Central TX. Wise to avoid plants that need well-drained soil. Trees & shrubs generally encourage in gardens except in areas where roots may clog pipes. After plants in ground, apply mulch to exposed soil to retain moisture & discourage weeds. Wood mulch has tendency to float & can easily wash away. **6. Maintenance:** Water regularly until plants established (usually one growing season). Weed as needed. Avoid fertilizing - usually unnecessary for most native plants. If garden located near gutter downspout or roof valley, consider adding rain barrels so will have extra store of water for irrigating during dry weather. COA Water Utility offers rebates for purchase of qualifying rain barrels. <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/watercon/rainbarrelprogram.htm>. Observe performance of garden over time to make sure functions as planned. If water remains for longer than 2 days, amend soil by gently cultivating top 4" to 6" to break-up surface crust. Add sand or compost to create more free-draining soil, then re-apply mulch to surface.

Pick up one of the city's Grow Green fact sheets at most area nurseries or go to www.growgreen.org

Find rain garden fact sheets at: http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/growgreen/downloads/raingarden_factsheet.pdf

Dawson Neighborhood Association (DNA) Draft Minutes – October 10, 2011

1. The meeting was called to order
2. Minutes from the August 8, 2011 were approved.
3. New Business:
 - a) APD Officer Barboza – discussed issues with attendees such as transients, car and home burglaries, etc. Email him at robert.barboza@austintexas.gov or call 974-8246 if needed.
 - b) Officer nominations: President – Myron, Vice-President & Newsletter editor – Sandy and Secretary – Sheila Fox
4. Old Business: None
5. Issues in the Neighborhood
 - Introduction of new attendees
 - The next meeting will be the annual potluck – 12.12.11.

Meeting closed.

Dawson Neighborhood Planning Contact Team (DNPCT) Draft Minutes – October 10, 2011

Minutes: Minutes from 8-8-11 were approved as written in the newsletter.

Membership Report: Raul Suarez introduced himself, but did not submit a DNPCT application.

New Business: DNPCT Board Member nominations for 2012:

(Per the Dawson Neighborhood Plan Contact Team Bylaws, adopted 4/11/11, the board will have 6-10 seats for at least one property owner, renter, and business operator. Additionally, representatives from 4 neighborhood geographic sectors (North, North Central, South Central, and South) are desired.)

Mike Densley of the Crow Bar – business operator, Peter Davis – North, Sandy McMillan – North, Julie Woods – North Central, Donna Knapp – Central, Marty Harris – South Central, Cole Alexander – South, Julie Alexander – South, Becky Sheller – South, Myron Smith - South

Old Business:

- a. 3800 S. Congress update: DNPCT representatives have viewed a preliminary development plan that seeks a FLUM change, zoning change, and variances for height limits. In particular, the proposal for height variances in the range of two extra stories adjacent to SF-3 properties is not consistent with the Dawson Neighborhood Plan. We do not know the current plans of the property owners.
- b. Construction on the rehabilitation hospital on Ben White is progressing.
- c. A neighborhood artist would like to paint a mural on the retaining wall on Reyna.

Meeting adjourned.

Rebecca Sheller, DNPCT Secretary in 2011