



I have always liked that old adage, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Here's a new twist: When life gives you rain, make a rain garden. Recent heavy rains have highlighted stormwater runoff problems and have sparked interest in new methods like rain gardens to handle excess runoff.

Rain gardens are an innovative, simple, low-cost solution for reducing runoff volumes during rain storms.

Many agencies and organizations in Georgia have started offering instructional sessions on building rain gardens because they can really help reduce stormwater runoff. Here in the Etowah River basin, one small business owner, Diane Minnick, runs Environmental Impact Assessment and has been instrumental in efforts to educate the public about the benefits of solving storm water problems naturally.

"In my subdivision we've built two rain gardens next to the swimming and tennis area and I have one in my yard," says Minnick. "They're a very effective way to get storm water to infiltrate back into the ground and to reduce the amount of runoff being dumped on neighbors downhill."

With each new roof, parking lot and sidewalk that is built in our watershed, there is a greater need for creative solutions to stormwater runoff problems. Many residents find that erosion and runoff around their homes increases as new developments are built upstream. If rain gardens were constructed throughout each new development, downstream changes in stormwater runoff would be reduced.

The Cherokee County Water and Sewerage Authority (CCWSA) wants more citizens to consider building rain gardens. "We're installing a demonstration rain garden outside our office on West Main Street in Canton so that our customers can see how they can handle runoff in their own yards," said Dwight Turner, CCWSA public relations director. "When we are finished there will be a sign with a diagram of the construction technique show-

ing how simple it is."

Turner says the rain garden outside the CCWSA office is not just for show, but will also address a flooding problem that occurs whenever there is heavy rain. "We will no longer have water and red clay washing all over our parking lot. The rain garden will contain it," he said.

A rain garden holds the water on the landscape so that it can soak into the ground instead of flowing into a street and down a storm drain or drainage ditch. Not only are rain gardens an effective way to reduce flooding and erosion caused by storm water runoff, they help minimize water pollution by using the soil to naturally filter out and break down pollutants. Reduced water pollution helps protect local drinking water supplies and the health of the fish in our rivers and streams.

Above ground a rain garden looks very much like traditional landscaping. A variety of different plants can be used, including native plants and plants that can tolerate both wet and dry conditions. Beneath the plants are layers of mulch, soil and sometimes gravel that are designed to catch the excess water and slowly disperse it through the ground and back into the water table. The process mimics what would happen naturally when rainwater soaks into the forest floor covered by "natural



This rain garden in the Brooke Park subdivision in Canton absorbs stormwater runoff from a parking lot. © Candace Stoughton/TNC

mulch."

If you would like to learn how to build a rain garden, consider attending the upcoming "Build a Rain Garden" workshop, 10 a.m. to noon on October 30, 2004, in downtown Canton. The workshop is just one of the many Celebrate Etowah events. To register, contact Lori Forrester at 770-591-7156 or email [brenaucrew@hotmail.com](mailto:brenaucrew@hotmail.com) To find out about other upcoming Celebrate

Etowah events go to [celebrate-etowah.org](http://celebrate-etowah.org).

For more information about The Nature Conservancy's work in the Etowah watershed visit [nature.org/georgia](http://nature.org/georgia). If you would like to be added to The Nature Conservancy's email updates list for the Etowah, please call 770-704-7280.



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

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