

bring on the rain garden

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Capturing
showers
may bring
flowers



Every time Kris and Dan Walseth gaze out their cabin window they think, “What a beautiful lake!”

To keep it that way, they put in a rain garden – well, *five* to be exact – of various sizes on their cabin property near Crosby, Minn.

“We just wanted to be good stewards of the lake and the land,” says Kris. “And we knew rain gardens were a great way to do that.”

Unlike a typical flower garden, a rain garden is a planted depression designed to take much of the excess rainwater run-off from a building and

its associated landscape, preventing it from running into a natural water-body or watershed. This is important because substances like phosphorus (found in lawn and garden fertilizers) can get washed into natural water-bodies with the rainfall runoff. Too much phosphorus in lakes, rivers and streams can cause prolific algae blooms and can be fatal to fish. In addition to phosphorous, other types of runoff contaminants (also called nonpoint source pollution) include soil sediment, bacteria, pesticides, pet waste and oil.

The plants – a selection of native vegetation, such as sedges,



A variety of plants with different leaf shapes, flowers, heights and other attributes bring visual appeal to the five rain gardens.

ferns, shrubs and trees – absorb the excess water as it slowly filters into the ground.

Besides soaking up excess water, rain gardens offer cabin owners additional benefits. They reduce the need for irrigation, because they use and optimize any rain that falls. Rain gardens also spruce up a dull yard with the addition of colorful and attractive native wildflowers and grasses, which in turn, attract butterflies and birds. Another nice advantage of rain gardens is that your cabin property will not be a breeding ground for pesky mosquitoes! The standing water needed for hatching mosquitoes is eliminated, as the water soaks into the ground within 24 to 48 hours. And lastly, planting wetland vegetation near the water's edge not only helps keep the shoreline from eroding by protecting the bank from wave action, but the cleaner water that results from rain gardens also encourages the development of fish habitats.

The Walseths dug and planted the rain gardens themselves in only a few days time. Making plant selections was the most time-consuming part of the process.

"I researched to be sure I had the

right plants in the right places. Plus, I wanted color in the spring, summer *and* fall," says Kris, who notes that the gardens even look good in the dead of winter. "The seed heads are pretty with the snow on them."

The Walseths are certainly pleased with the success of their rain gardens. And now when they peer out their cabin window, they have another thought: "What beautiful gardens!" ~

Freelancer Christy Heitger admits she has no green thumb, but she likes to brag about how she once kept an African Violet alive in her office for three years straight (a personal record).

Note: As plantings for your rain garden will depend upon your location and plant hardiness zone, you can search the Internet using the words "Rain Garden" and your state name. For more information on how to construct your own rain garden, visit Prairie Restorations, Inc. at www.prairieresto.com or the University of Rhode Island at www.urimga.org/rain_gardens.html#choose.

