Rain Gardens
A rain garden is simply a shallow depression in a landscape that temporarily collects and filters rain water from your roof, lawn, or driveway. Rain gardens are also called bioretention areas. They are quickly becoming a popular way for individual homeowners and communities to improve their environment and enhance their landscapes.

Rain gardens protect our water
Most home sites are designed to shed water quickly. Rainwater is often channeled onto pavement where it flows into storm drains and ends up in ponds, lakes, and rivers. Fertilizers and pesticides from our landscapes are also washed away with rainwater. Planting a rain garden helps prevent pesticides and fertilizers from running off of your landscape into water bodies.

By providing a designated place for rainwater to collect, rain gardens can also improve drainage issues in landscapes. Additionally, rain gardens allow water to infiltrate into the aquifer, which is particularly critical during drought. All of our drinking water and much of our irrigation water in Osceola County is taken from the underground Floridan Aquifer, which is recharged by rain.

How to grow your own rain garden
Before considering where to place your rain garden, call the Sunshine Line at 1-800-432-4770 to have underground utility lines marked for no charge. To select the best site for your rain garden, look at where stormwater puddles or flows in your landscape. If you have an area that currently collects rainwater, you could convert it into a rain garden. The other option is to place the garden where the soil drains very well, allowing for faster infiltration of stormwater.

When choosing a location for your bioretention area, consider where you could potentially direct downspouts to flow into the area. Plant your rain garden away from structures to prevent moisture near foundations. Avoid planting it under trees or near a septic system.

The size of your rain garden can be based on two factors. First, you can size the garden based on how much water runs off of your roof and pavement. The second option for sizing your garden is to simply make it the size you want it, and create an outlet for excess water in the rain garden to flow to a different area.

A rain garden should be about 6-8 inches deep. Some rain gardens are engineered with underground layers of material that allow for faster percolation of water; this is usually not necessary in sandy soils.

What to plant
Careful plant selection is important in a rain garden, because the plants may need to be able to tolerate extended periods of saturation as well as dry periods.

A rain garden can include plants with a variety of heights, forms, and textures. For maximum curb appeal, use mostly flowering perennials in your garden, with a few shrubs, trees, or grasses as a backdrop.

Do not use weed barrier in a rain garden, as it can prevent plant establishment and efficient percolation of water. Instead, keep three inches of natural mulch in your rain garden to suppress weeds.

The following are just a few of the plants that are adaptable to soggy sites and dry conditions:

- Trees
  - Cypress
These plants are native to Florida, and like many native plants, are well adapted to Florida's extreme weather conditions and have few pests. If you want to learn about promoting and preserving native plants, the new Osceola Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society is holding an organizational meeting June 20th, 6:30pm, at Extension Services in Osceola Heritage Park.

**Low-maintenance beauty**

The primary purpose of the rain garden is to improve water quality by allowing water to infiltrate the soil rather than running off of the landscape. For this reason, you should not fertilize or apply pesticides in or near your rain garden.

Rain gardens are intended to allow quick infiltration of water into the soil. However, if excessive rains cause water to puddle for extended periods, you can use a "Bt donut", (available at retail garden centers), to control mosquitoes.

Rain gardens may need trimmed back once or twice annually to keep a neat appearance, but with proper plant selection, maintenance should be minimal.

If you want to help keep our lakes and groundwater safe and healthy, grow a rain garden in your yard. For detailed instructions and photos of rain gardens, see: tappwater.org. To learn more about selecting plants that are right for your site, call 321-697-3015 and request a free "Florida-friendly plant guide".

**Free homeowner class:**

Low-Maintenance Landscapes
July 11th
10am-Noon
Extension Services, Osceola Heritage Park
Registration required: 321-697-3015