

## **Rain gardens help us use all the water we're given**

### **Plants for rain gardens**

A purposely created low spot on a property can intercept run-off water or accept water directed to it from downspouts, sump-pumps and other sources. When that spot is planted with species that love occasional flooding, the ground there can accept even more since a good deal is drawn into plants. There it's used in photosynthesis and cools the area as it's released as water vapor.

Plants' water use is not to be sneered at. A large tree can draw up over 1,000 gallons of water each day.

Some wetland native perennials can use gallons per day as individuals, tens of gallons as colonies.

Slowing run-off and directing water through the natural filter of soil and plants is a very important part of keeping up the quality of a community's drinking water. Although municipal- and industrial water treatment facilities are very important, water quality engineers are demonstrating that individuals treating the flow from residential properties can make a significant difference in the level of pollutants found in an area's lakes and streams. ([EPA report forecasts a 5 - 20% improvement...](#))

(<http://www.epa.gov/sciencematters/january2011/rainbarrels.htm> ) So it shouldn't be surprising that many communities in Europe and an increasing number in the U.S. and Canada are requiring rain gardens as part of new property development.

Check with your city or locality's planning board. Some will help you grade the edge of your property to create a rain garden, and provide you a list of suitable plants tailored to your region.

### **What to plant**

On the following pages are some of our favorite perennials and shrubs for rain gardens, sunny and shady.

All are hardy to USDA Hardiness Zone 5 and many are perennial even in colder zones. Some plants appear on both the sunny and shady list because they do occur naturally in a wide range of light conditions.

### **In the charts' height column**

Most plants height varies with environmental conditions, many in this list have a very wide range. In general, in sites with steadier moisture and more sun, the plant can be expected to reach the top of its range.

### **In the charts ' notes column, re "marginal" and "emergent"**

Most of these plants will live in occasionally flooded soil. On our lists "marginal" refers to plants that live along the edge of water and may be occasionally flooded. "Emergent" indicates a plant that can live for days or even weeks while submerged in shallow water as long as that flooding happens only or primarily during the growing season.

### **In the notes column, re "Clump"**

Tends to form a clump which spreads at a relatively slow pace, as compared to fast-spreading running root "invasives." It's worth noting that many if not most plants suited to really wet ground have running roots and so may be called invasive. Choose plants noted "clump" if a running habit is intolerable. However, recognize that some clump forming plants spread aggressively by seed. Further, consider the value of a shallow running root in a wetland: A surface-rooting colony has more physical stability -- like a wide raft, it's tip-proof. Also, since plant roots all need oxygen to survive and the surface of wet soil returns most quickly to aerobic conditions after a flood, these plants don't have to "hold their breath" so long as those with deeper roots. Some of this type of plant are even better behaved in a wetland than in the average garden. Queen of the prairie (*Filipendula rubra*) is a prime example. In a normally moist garden it runs, extending roots far and wide and popping up at wide intervals almost as if it's in search of something. However, in a moist ditch, rain garden or at the edge of a pond it forms a dense, majestic clump.

### **Paucity of shade species?**

The shady list is short. We've purposely left out species which have a very short growing season. Although such plants as toothwort (*Dentaria diphylla* and *D. laciniata*) are wonderful in a wet woodland garden, they can fall short in a space whose main purpose is to take up water. They go dormant earlier in summer than species such as skunk cabbage and jack in the pulpit which continue photosynthesizing into summer, using more water.

## Perennials for sunny to half-shady rain gardens

4 to 6 or more hours direct sun every day:

Plant name	height:	color:	blooms in:	notes:
<i>Aconitum</i> species (monkshood)	2-5'	blues	July-August	marginal, clump
<i>Acorus calamus</i> (sweet flag)	2-3'	tiny	July	emergent and marginal rush-like leaves
<i>Ajuga reptans</i> (ajuga)	6-10"	blue, white, pink	May	marginal; many with variegated leaves
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> (columbine)	2-4'	many	June	marginal, clump
<i>Aruncus dioicus</i> (goatsbeard)	3-4"	white	June-July	marginal, clump, best in half shade
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i> (swamp/marsh milkweed)	36-48"	lilac	June-July	marginal, clump
<i>Aster novae-angliae</i> (New England aster)	3-5'	white, lilac red violet	September	marginal
<i>Astilbe</i> species (false goats beard)	12-36"	white, pinks	June, July, Aug.	marginal, clump, needs half shade
<i>Astrantia</i> species (masterwort)	"	white		marginal, clump
<i>Calla palustris</i> (bog arum)		white	June-July	red berries follow; marginal and emergent
<i>Caltha palustris</i> (marsh marigold)	12-18"	yellow	May-June	marginal, emergent, clump summer dormancy
<i>Camassia cusickii</i> (Indian turnip)	18"	blue	May-June	marginal, clump (bulb)
<i>Chelone obliqua</i> (turtlehead)	2-3'	pink, white	July-August	marginal
<i>Cimicifuga</i> species C. racemosa (bugbane) C. simplex (autumn bugbane)	3-5' 3-4'	white white	June August-Sept	best in half shade marginal marginal, clump
<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i> (fireweed)	4'+	pink, white	June	marginal
<i>Eupatorium</i> species E. maculatum (Joe Pye weed) E. perfoliatum (boneset)	2-6' 2-4'	purple white	July July	marginal and emergent marginal and emergent
<i>Euthamia graminifolia</i> (grass-leaved/flat-topped goldenrod)	4-6'	yellow	August-Sept.	marginal
<b>Ferns: <i>Osmunda</i> species</b> Osmunda matteucia, Ostrich fern Osmunda regalis, Royal fern Osmunda claytoniana, Interrupted fern	2-4' 3-4'+ 1-2'			marginal, best in half shade marginal and emergent, clump marginal, acid
<i>Filipendula hexapetala</i> (dropwort, meadowsweet)	18-24"	white	June	marginal, clump
<i>Filipendula rubra</i> (Queen of prairie)	3-5'	pink	July	marginal
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> (Q. o' meadow)	2-4"	white	June	marginal
<b>Gentiana</b> G. andrewsii (bottle gentian) G./Gentianella quinquefolia (stiff gentian)	18-24" 24"	blue purple	July August	marginal, clump marginal, biennial
<i>Helenium autumnale</i> (Helen's flower, sneezeweed)	3-4'	orange, red-o, yellow	July-August	marginal, clump
<i>Heemerocallis</i> species (daylily)	1-6'	no blues	June-July	marginal
<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i> (hardy hibiscus)	3-5'	white, red, pink	July-August	marginal, clump
<i>Hosta</i> sun tolerant species H. plantaginea, H. undulata	12-24"	white, lilac	July-August	marginal, clump best in part shade

## Perennials for sunny to half-shady rain gardens (Cont'd.)

4 to 6 or more hours direct sun every day:

Iris species	24-36"	many	May, June, July	most can't take standing water during winter; clump
Japanese I. kaempferi, Rabbit-ear I. laevigata, sweet flag I. pseudacorus, Siberian I. sibirica, wild blue, I. versicolor				
<b>Liatis</b> (blazing star)		all: pink, rose, or purple	August-Sept.	marginal, clump
L. ligustylis (meadow blazing star)	3-5'		July-August	marginal, clump
L. pycnostachya (prairie blazing star)	3-5'		July	marginal, clump
L. spicata (blazing star)	2-4'	purple, white		
<b>Lobelia species</b>	18-36"	red, blue	July, August	marginal, clump
(L. cardinalis: cardinal flower; L. siphilitica, Great blue lobelia)				
<b>Lysimachia</b> (loosestrife; not related to the outlawed purple loosestrife)				
L. ciliata (fringed loosestrife)	2-3'	yellow	June	marginal
L. nummularia (golden coins)	4"	yellow	June	marginal
L. punctata (garden loosestrife)	2-3'	yellow	June-July	marginal
L. quadrifolia (whorled/prairie loosestrife)	1-3'	yellow	June-July	marginal
L. terrestris (swamp candles)	1-3'	yellow	July-August	marginal
<b>Mentha aquatica</b> (water mint)		violet	June	marginal and emergent
<b>Monarda species</b> (bee balm)	2-3'	red, pinks	June-July	marginal
<b>Myosotis scorpioides</b> (creeping forget me not)	4-6"	blue	June-August	marginal and emergent/floating
<b>Phalaris arundinacea</b> (ribbon grass)	2-3'	green/grain	July	marginal
<b>Physostegia virginiana</b> (obedient plant)	1-3'	pink, white	July-August	marginal
<b>Polygonum species</b>				
knotweed, border jewel: P. affine	10"	white	June, July	seed heads pink/red; marginal
P. Bistorta 'Superbum' snakeweed,	18-24"	white/pink	July	marginal and emergent
<b>Primula species</b>	1-2'	all	May-June	marginal, clump
Candelabra primroses P. beesiana, P. japonica				
<b>Pycnanthemum virginianum</b> (mountain mint)	2-3'	white	June	marginal
<b>Ranunculus acris</b> (swamp buttercup)	1-3'	yellow	May-June	marginal, clump
<b>Rudbeckia laciniata</b> (green-headed coneflower)	3-8'	yellow	July-August	marginal
<b>Sagittaria latifolia</b> (arrowhead)	24-36"	white	July	arrow shaped leaves; emergent and marginal
<b>Sambucus ebulus</b> (dwarf elder)	3-4'	white	June	marginal, clump
<b>Silphium perfoliatum</b> (cup plant)	6-12'	yellow	July-August	marginal, clump
<b>Silphium terebinthinaceum</b> (prairie dock)	6-12'	yellow	July-August	height is in flower stem, lvs. basal marginal and emergent, clump
<b>Solidago uliginosa</b> (bog goldenrod)	2-5'	yellow	August - Sept.	marginal
<b>Teucrium chamaedrys</b> (germander)	1'	purple	July	marginal
<b>Thalictrum species</b> (meadow rue)	2-6'	white, pinks	June-July	marginal; best in half shade, clump
<b>Trollius europaeus</b> (globeflower)	18-36"	yellow	May-July	marginal, clump
<b>Typha species</b> (cat-tail) (T. angustifolia, T. minima)	1-5'	tiny		emergent and marginal

## Perennials for sunny to half-shady rain gardens (Cont'd.)

4 to 6 or more hours direct sun every day:

<i>Verbena hastata</i> (blue/hoary vervain)	2-6'	purple	July	marginal, clump
<i>Vernonia novaboracensis</i> (New York ironweed)	3-7'	purple	August	marginal, clump
<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i> (culver's root)	3-5'	white	July-August	marginal, clump
<i>Viola sororia</i> (common violet)	6"	purple	May	marginal
<i>Zizia aurea</i> (golden Alexanders)	1-3'	yellow	May-June	marginal

## Perennials for shady rain gardens

2-4 hours direct sun each day (may be full sun in spring)

Plant name	height:	color:	blooms in:	notes:
<i>Acorus calamus</i> (sweet flag)	2-3'	tiny	July	emergent & marginal; fragrant leaf
<i>Actaea species</i> (baneberry)				
<i>A. pachypoda</i> (doll's eyes, white b.)	2'	white	May-June	marginal, clump, white berries
<i>A. rubra</i> (red baneberry)	2-3'	white	May-June	marginal, clump, red berries
<i>Ajuga reptans</i> (bugle, ajuga)	6-10"	blue, pink	May	marginal
<i>Anemone canadensis</i> (Canada anemone)	2'	white	May, June	marginal
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i> (columbine)	2-4'	many	June	marginal, clump
<i>Arisaema species</i> (jack in pulpit)	6-24"	tiny	June	marginal, clump
<i>Astilbe species</i> (false goats beard)	12-36"	white, pinks	June, July, Aug.	marginal, clump
<i>Carex species</i> (___ sedge)	1-2'			marginal; some variegated, clump
<i>Chelone obliqua</i> (turtlehead)	2-3'	pink, white	July-August	marginal
<i>Cimicifuga species</i>				
<i>C. racemosa</i> (bugbane)	3-5'	white	June	marginal
<i>C. simplex</i> (autumn bugbane)	3-4'	white	August-Sept	marginal, clump
<i>Cypripedium calceolus</i> (yellow lady's slipper)	10"	yellow	June	marginal; protected, clump
<i>Erythronium spp.</i> (trout lily)	6"	yellow	April-May	marginal; summer dormancy
<b>Ferns: <i>Osmunda species</i></b>				
Ostrich fern	2-4'			marginal, invasive
Royal fern	3-4'+			marginal and emergent
Interrupted fern	1-2'			marginal, acid
<i>Hosta species</i>	12-36"	lilac	July	marginal, clump
<i>H. sieboldiana</i> , <i>H. glauca</i> , <i>H. undulata</i>				
<i>Ligularia species</i> (leopard plant)	3-5'	yellow	June-July	marginal, clump
<b>Lilium</b>				
<i>L. canadense</i> (wild lily)	3-4'	orange	July	marginal
<i>L. michiganense</i> (Michigan lily)	4-5'	orange	July	marginal, clump
<i>L. philadelphicum</i> (wood lily)	2-3'	orange	July	marginal, clump
<i>Lobelia species</i>	18-36"	red, blue	July, August	marginal, clump
( <i>L. cardinalis</i> : cardinal flower; <i>L. siphilitica</i> , Great blue lobelia)				
<i>Mertensia virginica</i> (Virginia bluebells)	18"	blue	May	marginal, clump
<i>Monarda species</i> (bee balm)	2-3'	red, pinks	June-July	marginal
<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i> (creeping forget-me-not)	3-6"	lt. blue	June-July	
<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i> (sensitive fern)	2-3'	none		marginal

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## Perennials for shady rain gardens (Cont'd.)

2-4 hours direct sun each day (may be full sun in spring)

Rodgersia species (rodgersia) R. aesculifolia, R. pinnata	2-3'	white, pinks	June-July	marginal, clump
Symplocarpus foetidus (skunk cabbage)	12-18"			marginal and emergent
Thalictrum species (meadow rue) T. aquilegifolium (columbine meadow rue) T. dasycarpum (tall meadow rue) T. dioicum (early meadow rue) T. rochebrunianum (lavender mist m.r.)	2-3' to 6' 3-5' to 8'	violet white green violet, pink	May-June June June August	marginal, clump marginal, clump marginal, clump marginal, clump
Trollius europaeus (globeflower) T. ledbourii	18-36" 2-3'	yellow yellow	May-June June-July	marginal, clump marginal, clump

## Annual plants for rain gardens

Plant name	height:	color:	blooms in:	notes:
Colocasia esculenta (elephant ear)	2-5'		marginal; tender	
Impatiens capensis (spotted touch-me-not)	2-4'	orange-yellow	July-frost	good filler over summer-dormants; will self-sow
Lantana hybrids (ham n' eggs)	18-24"	yellow, pink	June-Sept	marginal; tender
Ricinus communis (castor bean)	3-6'	reddish	July-August	marginal; tender

## Shrubs for rain gardens

We usually plant woody species only around the edges of a rain garden so only their roots occupy the low space. We aren't keen on locating woody plants' stems in our rain gardens since the gardens can tend to trap floating debris, especially during winter and our way to alleviate that is to cut back hard each fall.

Plant name	height:	color:	blooms in:	notes:
Cornus species (dogwood)	8-10"	tiny	June	marginal; colorful stems on redbtwig, yellowtwig; sun to half shade
Lindera benzoin (spicebush)	6-8'	yellow-green	April	red berry; sun to shade; marginal
Physocarpus opulifolius (ninebark)	3-9'	white	June	marginal
Salix species (pussy willow)	5-15'	yellow-green	April	sun; marginal; invasive
Sambucus canadensis (elderberry)	8'+	white	June	marginal
Viburnum opulus, V. trilobum (Cranberrybush viburnum)	3-12'	white	May-June	sun to half shade; marginal

## Trees for rain gardens

Plant name	height:	color:	blooms in:	notes:
Alnus species (alders)	30'+			sun; marginal
Metasequoia glyptostroboides (dawn redwood)	60'+			4 hours sun or more; marginal
Populus species (poplars)	30-100'			sun; marginal
Salix species (willow)	30-80'			sun; marginal
Taxodium distichum (bald cypress)	60'+			sun; marginal

**Common name reference, sun to part sun:**

Ajuga/Bugle, *Ajuga reptans*  
Arrowhead, *Sagittaria latifolia*  
Astilbe/False spirea, *Astilbe* species  
Bee balm/bergamot, *Monarda* species  
Bistort/great bistort/snakeweed, *Polygonum bistortum*  
Blazing star, *Liatris spicata*  
Blazing star/meadow blazing star, *Liatris ligustylis*  
Blazing star/prairie blazing star, *Liatris pycnostachya*  
Blue flag, *Iris versicolor*  
Blue vervain, *Verbena hastata*  
Bog arum, *Calla palustris*  
Bog goldenrod, *Solidago uliginosa*  
Border jewel, *Polygonum affine*  
Bottle gentian, *Gentiana andrewsii*  
Canary reed grass, *Phalaris arundinacea*  
Cardinal flower/Red birds, *Lobelia cardinalis*  
Cat-tail, *Typha* species  
Cinnamon fern, *Osmunda cinnamomea*  
Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*  
Creeping forget-me-not, *Myosotis scorpioides*  
Creeping jenny, *Lysimachia nummularia*  
Culver's root, *Veronicastrum virginicum*  
Cup plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*  
Daylily, *Hemerocallis* species  
Dropwort/meadowsweet, *Filipendula hexapetala*/F. *vulgaris*  
Elder/dwarf elder, *Sambucus ebulus*  
Fairy candle, bugbane, rattlesnake root, *Cimicifuga* species  
Ferns, *Osmunda* species  
Fireweed, *Epilobium angustifolium*  
Gardener's garters, *Phalaris arundinacea*  
Gentian, *Gentiana*  
Germander, *Teucrium chamaedrys*  
Globeflower, *Trollius* species  
Goatsbeard/Child of two worlds, *Aruncus dioicus*  
Golden Alexanders, *Zizia aurea*  
Golden coins, *Lysimachia nummularia aurea*  
Goldenrod, *Solidago* species, *Euthamia* species  
Grass leaf goldenrod/Flat topped goldenrod, *Euthamia graminifolia*  
Great blue lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica*  
Greenheaded coneflower, *Rudbeckia laciniata*  
Hardy hibiscus/swamp mallow, *Hibiscus moscheutos*  
Helen's flower/sneezeweed, *Helenium autumnale*  
Hoary vervain, *Verbena hastata*  
Hosta, *Hosta*  
Interrupted fern, *Osmunda claytoniana*  
Iris, *Iris*  
Ironweed, *Vernonia* species  
Japanese iris, *Iris kampfieri*  
Joe Pye, Boneset/Thoroughwort, *Eupatorium* species  
Knotweed, *Polygonum* species  
Lobelia, *Lobelia*  
Loosestrife, *Lysimachia*  
Marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris*  
Masterwort, *Astrantia* species  
Meadow rue, *Thalictrum* species

Monkshood, *Aconitum* species  
Mountain mint, *Pycnanthemum virginianum*  
New England aster, *Aster novae-angliae*  
New York ironweed, *Vernonia novaboracensis*  
Obedient plant/false dragonshead, *Physostegia virginiana*  
Ostrich fern, *Osmunda matteucia*  
Prairie dock, *Silphium terebinthinaceum*  
Primrose/cowslip, *Primula* species  
Quamas/Camas/Indian turnip, *Camassia cusickii*  
Queen of the meadow, *Filipendula ulmaria*  
Queen of the prairie, *Filipendula rubra*  
Rabbit ear iris, *Iris laevigata*  
Ribbon grass, *Phalaris arundinacea*  
Royal fern, *Osmunda regalis*  
Sensitive fern, *Onoclea sensibilis*  
Siberian iris, *Iris sibirica*  
Stiff gentian, *Gentiana quinquefolia*  
Swam milkweed/marsh milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*  
Swamp buttercup, *Ranunculus acris*  
Sweet flag, *Acorus calamus*  
Sweet flag, *Iris pseudacorus*  
Turtlehead, *Chelone obliqua*  
Vervain, *Verbena hastata*  
Violet/Common violet, *Viola sororia*  
Water mint, *Mentha aquatica*

**Common name reference, shade**

Ajuga, bugle, *Ajuga reptans*  
Anemone, *Anemone*  
Astilbe, *Astilbe*  
Baneberry, *Actaea* species  
Bee balm, *Monarda* species  
Bugbane, *Cimicifuga* species  
Canada anemone, *Anemone canadensis*  
Cardinal flower, *Lobelia cardinalis*  
Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*  
Columbine meadow rue, *Thalictrum aquilegifolium*  
Creeping forget-me-not, *Myosotis scorpioides*  
Doll's eyes, *Actaea pachypoda*  
Fairy candle, *Cimicifuga* species  
False goatsbeard, *Astilbe*  
Ferns: *Osmunda* and *Onoclea* species  
Fingerflower, *Rodgersia* species  
Globeflower, *Trollius europaeus*  
Great blue lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica*  
Groundsel, *Ligularia*  
Hosta, *Hosta*  
Jack in the pulpit, *Arisaema* species  
Lady's slipper, *Cypripedium calceolus*  
Leopard plant, *Ligularia*  
*Ligularia*, *Ligularia*  
Lily, *Lilium* species  
Lobelia, *Lobelia*  
Meadow rue, *Thalictrum* species  
Rattlesnake weed, *Cimicifuga* species  
Red baneberry, *Actaea rubra*

Rogers flower, Rodgersia species  
Sedge, Carex species  
Sweet flag/false sweet flag, Acorus calamus  
Trout lily, Erythronium species  
Turtlehead, Chelone obliqua  
Virginia bluebells, Mertensia virginica  
White baneberry, Actaea pachypoda  
Skunk cabbage, Symplocarpus foetidus

**Common name reference, annuals, shrubs, trees**

Castor bean, Ricinus communis  
Elephant ear, Colocasia esculenta  
Ham 'n eggs, Lantana hybrids  
Lantana, Lantana  
Touch-me-not/spotted touch-me-not, Impatiens capensis

Cranberrybush viburnum, Viburnum trilobum, V. opulus  
Dogwood, Cornus species  
Elder/Elderberry, Sambucus canadensis  
Ninebark, Physocarpus opulifolius  
Spicebush, Lindera benzoin  
Willow, Salix species

Alder, Alnus species  
Bald cypress, Taxodium distichum  
Dawn redwood, Metasequoia glyptostroboides  
Poplar/Cottonwood, Populus species  
Willow, Salix species