



Ottawa RIVERKEEPER®  
SENTINELLE Outaouais

# URBAN RAIN GARDENS

Stormwater runoff is a leading cause of pollution in the Ottawa River. One way that you can help is by creating a rain garden on your property.



Photo: Ottawa City Council

*A rain garden helps reduce runoff from nearby houses and paved surfaces.*

**A**lmost 80% of Canadians live in urban areas. What does this mean? Expanding urban areas means added impervious surfaces such as roads and parking lots. This means that when it rains, there is less space for water to soak into the ground, and more pollutant-laden water that runs off into the river. Stormwater flows off of streets, rooftops, and lawns, into stormwater sewers, carrying pesticides, fertilizers, oil, garbage, and other pollutants.

In newer neighbourhoods, stormwater flows directly from sewers into the river without any treatment. Older neighbourhoods have combined sewer systems that send stormwater and all of our wastewater to treatment plants. However these old sewers often get filled over capacity when it rains, so cities unload diluted raw sewage directly into the river to prevent flooding and sewage backups in homes. In the city of Ottawa alone, there are 16 sewer overflow sites along the Ottawa River, many located near public beaches. Sewage overflows contaminate our river and make water unsafe for swimming and fishing.

**You can help** reduce stormwater runoff and sewage overflow by planting a rain garden on your property - even if you live far from the water. Rain gardens absorb and filter stormwater runoff when it rains and are a simple solution to a big problem.

## Did you know?

In 2013 alone, sewer overflows in Ottawa caused 82 million litres of sewage to spill into the Ottawa River.

*Defending the Ottawa River. Protecting our communities.  
À la défense de la rivière des Outaouais. Pour la protection de nos communautés.*



## What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is a landscaped depression designed to capture and store stormwater. It filters out pollutants, recharges groundwater supply, and minimizes stormwater flowing into sewer systems.

### A Rain Garden...



Illustration: R Balderson

*Rain gardens have deep root systems that typically absorb 30 % more water than a conventional mowed lawn.*

- ✓ Helps keep the Ottawa River clean for swimming and fishing
- ✓ Creates habitat for birds and butterflies
- ✓ Is inexpensive and easy to install
- ✓ Adds beauty to your property
- ✓ Reduces the risk of flooding
- ✓ Is low maintenance

## How to Plant a Rain Garden

- 1- **Location:** Locate a low point on your property at least 10 feet from your house and away from a septic system. The site should be in full sun or partial shade.
- 2- **Drainage:** Make sure the site has good drainage by doing a percolation test. Dig a hole and fill it with water to make sure soils can absorb sufficient water. Sandy soils are best for drainage.
- 3- **Depth and size:** Estimate the amount of water that will drain into the area. The slower the drainage rate, the deeper the depression must be. A typical rain garden is 8 to 28 inches deep.
- 4- **Plant selection:** Select native perennials, shrubs, and grasses because they can tolerate dry and wet conditions and are easy to maintain. See below for examples and ask your local gardening store.
- 5- **Maintenance:** Direct efforts during the first 1-2 years towards weeding and watering. Once the plants are established, no further maintenance is generally needed.
- 6- **Feel good** about helping to keep the river clean and spread the word to your neighbour!

These are some low maintenance native plants that you can use for your rain garden in the Ottawa River area.

### Perennials

swamp milkweed



marsh marigold



quamash



summersweet



### Shrubs

buttonbush



arrowwood



spice bush



winterberry



### Grasses and Sedges

palm sedge



tussock sedge



muhly grass



panic grass

