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SEPTEMBER
Cloudy

Rain garden to showcase native blooms

Thursday, September 13, 2007

JENNIFER NESBITT

ThisWeek Staff Writer

About 30 Clintonville residents gathered last Saturday to plant a garden that would not only add color to a local park, but better the environment by filtering stormwater runoff.



BY GILES CLEMENT/THISWEEK

The Adena Brook Community, in conjunction with representatives of the Friends of the Lower Olentangy Water Shed and the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks, planted a 1,000-square-foot rain garden in Overbrook Ravine Park, at the corner of High Street and Overbrook Drive.

Georgia and Steve Blum-Herminghausen join other volunteers in building a rain garden at Overbrook Drive and High Street on Saturday morning.

The garden features plants that are native to Ohio, such as switchgrass, swamp milkweed and cardinal flower. The garden will hold water for 24 to 48 hours, allowing it to filter through the plants' roots to remove pollutants, said Vinnie Tremante, a consultant with Williams Creek Consulting who designed the garden.

All of the plants chosen favor marshy, wetland areas because that portion of the park receives a lot of runoff from



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High Street, Tremante said.

"It's kind of cool," said Maureen Lorenz, the Columbus Department of Recreation and Parks landscape architect who helped on the project. "Stormwater going down the gutter of High Street will go into the rain garden."

The hope is that the rain garden will serve as a pilot project, not just for the city, but for residents as well.

Lorenz said the city already is looking at other locations that might benefit from rain gardens, such as city landscapes or streetscapes.

"We're definitely thinking of other areas," Lorenz said. "The city of Columbus is committed to a more green infrastructure."

The main purpose of the recently built rain garden, however, was to demonstrate to residents how they can build rain gardens in their own backyards.

"It's more of what they can look like in your own backyard," Lorenz said. "It just does more good than making a garden."

One difference between the Overbrook Ravine Park rain garden and a private rain garden is size, Tremante said. Typically, a homeowner would build a 100- to 300-square-foot rain garden, depending on how the soil around the home drains.

Tremante said he was excited by the rain garden project because it shows that people are starting to realize that their homes, driveways and lawns contribute to stormwater runoff problems.

"I don't think it's intuitive for people to think that their house or their driveway contributes to the stormwater problem," Tremante said. "People are hopefully getting away from the traditional big lawn, chemical tradition that's so popular in our landscape."

While one yard's rain garden isn't going to solve all the problems with stormwater, when a group like the Adena Brook Community comes together and commits to building rain gardens across the neighborhood, it can have an impact, Tremante said.

He said it typically costs \$4 to \$6 per square foot to install a rain garden. It can be even less for people who do all of the research, designing and planting themselves.

"If you do it yourself, you're just looking at plant costs," Tremante said.

Avid gardeners willing to research rain gardens should have no problems finding which plants would be best suited to their

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soil type and their backyard.

"If you don't know your plants too well, then you would want to get some help," Tremante said.

He said homeowners who want to hire a landscape architect to build a rain garden should be careful because not many landscapers know how to design a proper rain garden.

"Most designers don't have that background," Tremante said.

In addition to filtering runoff, Tremante said rain gardens can add a nice aesthetic. If planned well, the plants in a rain garden will bloom at different times throughout the year.

Some research also has shown that rain gardens help to kill off mosquitoes, Tremante said, and many of the plants attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

"For people who are interested in bringing wildlife to your backyard, this would be a way to introduce plants that you normally wouldn't," Tremante said.

One thing people interested in planting rain gardens should know, Tremante said, is how easy it can be. The project mainly involves excavating a portion of a yard, conditioning the soil and planting.

"It could be as simple as a one-weekend project," Tremante said. "Anyone can do it."

Susan Michael Barrett, who organized the rain garden project for the Adena Brook Community, said she hopes rain gardens spread across the city.

"Now we have a model teaching rain garden going in. It's a beginning," Barrett said. "I'm dreaming of rain gardens everywhere."

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