



## BENEFICIAL RAIN GARDENS

Whether it's a gentle spring drizzle or a pounding summer storm, rain has an effect on your garden. But your garden can affect rain, too, filtering out pollution before the rain water runs into lakes or streams.

So what is a rain garden? It's a garden in a shallow depression, made specifically to collect and filter rain water. Water doesn't stand in a rain garden, but trickles through the soil. Oil, chemicals and other pollutants are filtered and stopped by soil particles or taken up by roots.

These gardens have been used for years in commercial landscapes, but now they're turning up in front yards, too. Rain gardens are great habitats for birds, butterflies and beneficial insects. But they're not a breeding ground for mosquitoes because the water doesn't stand long. Check out the plan on p. 40 for some planting suggestions.

Here, we've included several rain gardens and a couple of other rain-garden-friendly ideas. You don't have to use all these techniques, or install so many individual gardens to make this work for you — choose the ideas that best fit your yard.

**MORE ON THE WEB** There's a lot of great information out there about building rain gardens. Here are a couple of good Web sites to help you learn more:

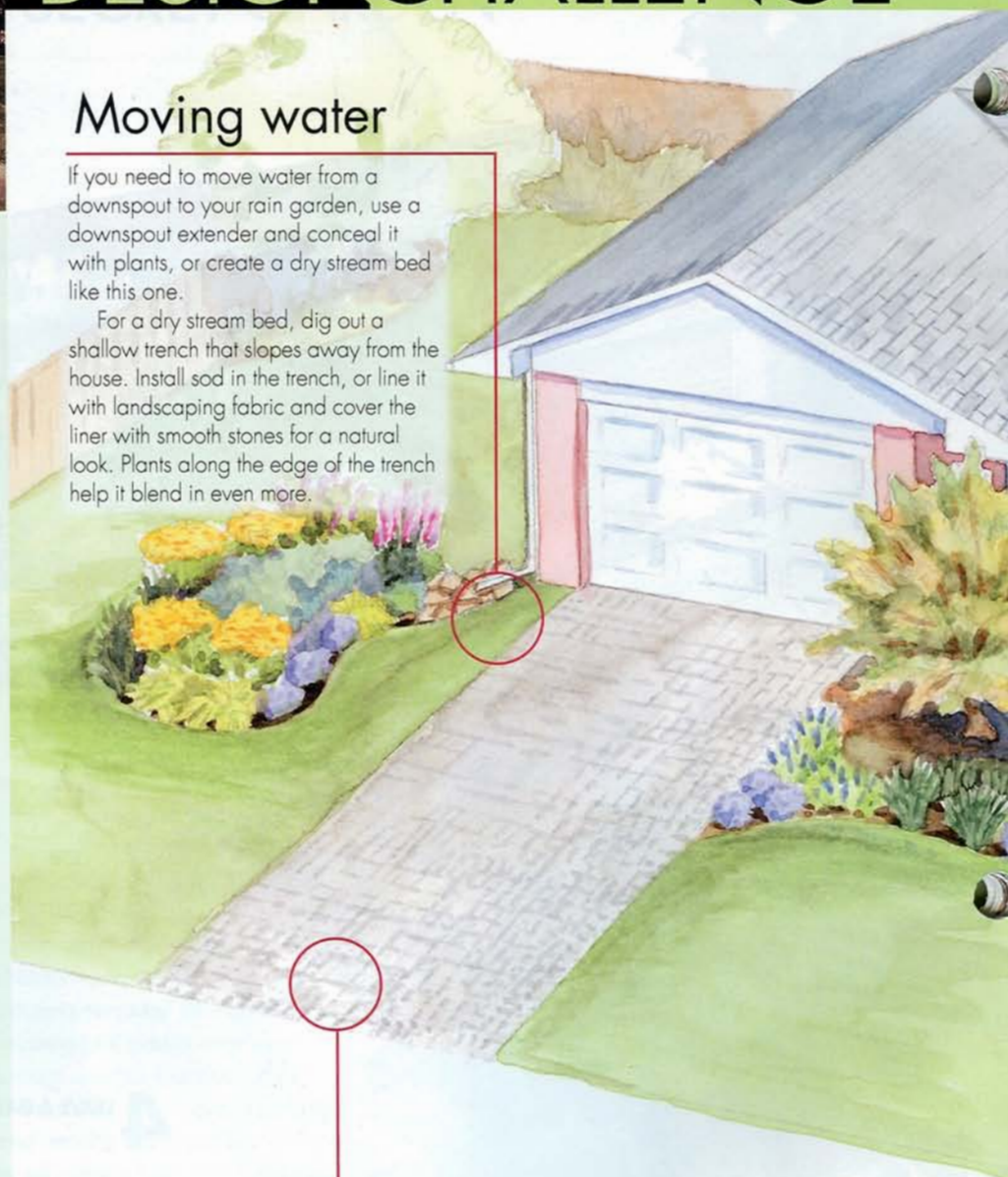
[www.raingardens.org](http://www.raingardens.org)

<http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/raingarden/>

## Moving water

If you need to move water from a downspout to your rain garden, use a downspout extender and conceal it with plants, or create a dry stream bed like this one.

For a dry stream bed, dig out a shallow trench that slopes away from the house. Install sod in the trench, or line it with landscaping fabric and cover the liner with smooth stones for a natural look. Plants along the edge of the trench help it blend in even more.



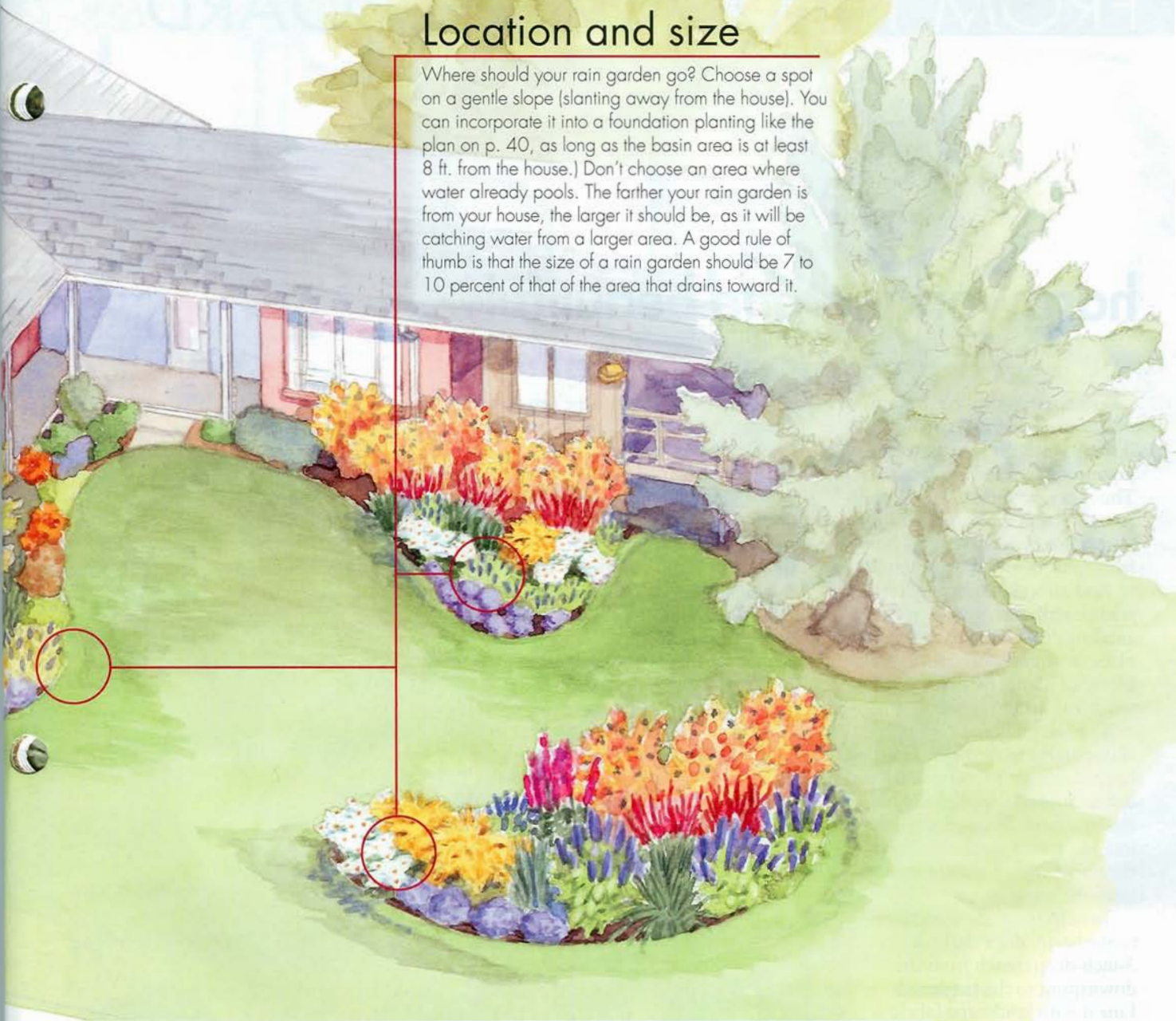
## Let it soak in

Your driveway is one of the biggest impermeable surfaces on your property. Oil, antifreeze and chemicals collect on it, then wash off when it rains. If your driveway slopes to the sides, you can install a rain garden along the edges to catch contaminated water.

But if your driveway slopes toward the street, as most do, put in a permeable driveway. Although you can find contractors to install permeable asphalt or concrete, another attractive solution is to use individual concrete pavers with clipped corners. They're installed over a 10- to 12-in.-thick pad of gravel and sand. When they're laid together, they leave diamond-shaped openings. You fill the openings with fine brick chips or pea gravel, so water can run between the pavers and be filtered through soil.

## Location and size

Where should your rain garden go? Choose a spot on a gentle slope (slanting away from the house). You can incorporate it into a foundation planting like the plan on p. 40, as long as the basin area is at least 8 ft. from the house.) Don't choose an area where water already pools. The farther your rain garden is from your house, the larger it should be, as it will be catching water from a larger area. A good rule of thumb is that the size of a rain garden should be 7 to 10 percent of that of the area that drains toward it.



## MAKE BAD DRAINAGE BETTER

Well-drained soil is best for a rain garden, but you can have a rain garden in poorly drained clay if you do a little extra work.

Most yards need only a 10- to 12-in.-deep bowl scooped out, with the soil mounded into a berm on the down-slope side. If you have heavy clay, you'll need to make the basin deeper, about 24 to 36 in. At the bottom, put in a 8- to 12-in.-deep layer of gravel. Cover it with 1 to 2 ft. of a mix of soil (25 percent), compost (25 percent) and coarse sand (50 percent) so water can drain easily. Finally, cover the top with a layer of topsoil for planting.

In really poorly drained areas, you may even need to have a professional install a drainage pipe

in the bottom of the basin. Water will have to trickle down through the soil before it reaches the drainage pipe, so your rain garden will still remove most pollutants from the water.

