

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL RAIN GARDENS

1 Find a site

Take a walk in the rain to find a good site for your garden.

2 All on board?

Consult with municipality, neighbours, school admin (if at a school), BC One Call ("Call before you dig" 1 800-474-6886).

3 Size it right

Make sure you have a workable ratio of impervious area to garden area (5:1 is a typical "sweet spot" in Metro Van, but be more cautious e.g. 3:1 in higher-rainfall areas). Keep in mind that your garden's ability to absorb water will increase as it matures.

4 Get water in

Decide how to get stormwater runoff into the rain garden.

5 Let water out

Make sure there's a safe overflow route for any excess.

6 Play in the dirt

Excavate (usually 12" to 18" deep will do), backfill about ¾ full with mixture of excavated material & compost, create contours & meanders to slow the water & provide maximum opportunity for retention & absorption.

7 Add structure

Anchor the garden physically & visually with boulders, large woody debris and a thin layer of gravel in areas where water will be flowing and would cause erosion.

8 Define edges

Use strong edges to make your garden look intentional.

9 Provide access

Plan for access to &/or passage across the rain garden.

10 Plant effectively

Right plants (and plenty of 'em), right places, no invasives.

11 Mulch bare soil

Cover any bare soil with woodchips; bits of leaves, needles, twigs, are desirable. (Bark mulch is too light, too easily compacted.) Bare soil is a magnet for weeds; it also gets easily compacted and then can't absorb water.

12 Look & tweak

Take another walk in the rain to see how things are working; make adjustments as needed.

13 Maintain

Check for sediments blocking intake or outflow; remove litter & worst of weeds (tallest and/or going to seed). Keep edges of garden tidy, then the rest will appear intentional even if it's a bit messier. Use selective pruning (lift, thin, grab 'n' snip) rather than shearing, for better habitat value and a more relaxed look that's less work to maintain.

14 Inform

Advertise rain garden function with signage.

15 Observe & enjoy!

Watch your garden become more beautiful and its performance improve over time, as plants grow and roots & soil biota open new porosities for water absorption.