

What I Know and What I Sort of Know

Amy Roskilly, MGV 2016

When I was asked to present to Cuyahoga County Master Gardeners on Rain Gardens a couple years ago, I thought – what am I going to tell these people about plants that they don't already know? This was before I took the Master Gardener classes and met all you fine folks. What I've realized is that we all have our various interests/expertise and that together we make for a heck of an information bank.

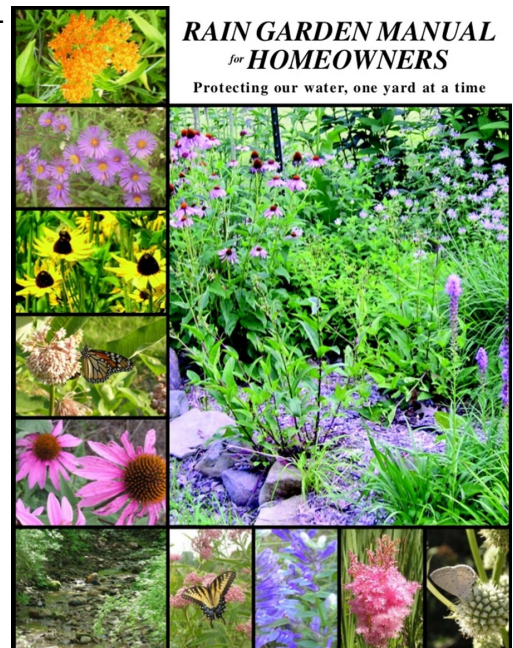
I work in the environmental field, but by no means do I know everything about the environment that surrounds us. I am terrible at identifying trees ("It's pretty" is my usual answer), but I know whom to go to to get the answer quickly!! I feel the same about Master Gardeners. Throwing the word 'master' before 'gardener' conjures up the idea that we know everything. I know I'm not the only one who has had people ask advice about their gardens and who believe that I must have all the answers. I laugh and laugh and explain to them that I have this information bank to pull from now, and while I know more, I don't know it all. Besides, no one likes a know-it-all!

However, I do have several areas that hold my interest. Dare I say I'm an expert in them? I don't know if I'd be that presumptuous. One area is stormwater. Blame it on the day job, but my agency (Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District) works mostly in this field. Stormwater is rain and snow melt. Ideally, this should all flow over the land and enter our storm drain and ditches with clean water. We know this doesn't happen. Stormwater picks up fertilizer, pesticides, oil, gas, dog waste, litter, sediment and a host of other things. With our increased impervious (hard) surface in a county that is over 95% developed, we have more stormwater pollution than ever. But there are ways an individual can help slow it down and keep the rain where it falls, like it used to before we paved over with

concrete or grass (which --let's face it -- is green concrete with its short root system and compacted soils).

Rain Gardens are a way to incorporate beautiful native plants into your yard while helping stormwater runoff. They are meant to capture and filter stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces around your home, such as rooftops and driveways, before it enters local waterways. It is a functional garden that keeps water in it for 24-48 hours and lets it soak naturally back into the ground. The long root systems help to filter out pollutants. You see these on a larger scale in bioretention basins, which treat a much bigger drainage area from neighborhoods, shopping malls, etc.

To work properly, a rain garden has to be built correctly. For more information, read the Rain Garden Manual for Homeowners which can be found here -- www.cuyahogawcd.org/programs/rain-gardens-native



RAIN GARDEN MANUAL for HOMEOWNERS Protecting our water, one yard at a time

plants. Or just ask me, I can send you one!