

DEER-PROOF RAIN GARDEN

takes patience, helping hands

By Lalita Malik

After taking multiple classes on stormwater management, I knew a rain garden would be a good addition to my landscape. I had two deterrents. First, I did not have a sunny spot at the area where water came down my yard. Second, how would I dig it? After I had the trees removed to make room for the sun, the first deterrent disappeared. I considered getting professional help with the garden, but initial estimates were too high, and I did not want a formal garden. So I decided to make my rain garden a neighborhood enterprise.

When my trees were coming down, I received a call from my neighbor, Sharon Herb, asking if they could have the wood if I had no plans for it. I gladly said yes. Another neighbor, Tim Golz, also wanted the wood. Paul Herb has a tractor and agreed to take the logs from the woods across to his property, while Tim opted to take the logs near the driveway. I asked Paul if he would dig the saucer I need for my rain garden. Paul agreed, and I marked out the area I wanted dug. I measured the required distance from my leach field and driveway and the digging started. The tractor was sitting lower than the area to be dug, so Paul had a tough time seeing the marked area from the cab. With me standing in front and guiding the bucket, the area was dug up.

The hole was rectangular vs. saucer-shaped and deeper than what the directions indicated. Not to worry. I asked Golz if he could bring me used hay from his stables to use as mulch and topsoil. Deer are not supposed to like horse manure, so I figured my plan would have the added benefit of keeping deer away. In addition to the hay, Tim brought water lilies and ferns from around his pond and planted them at the bottom of the rain garden. Tim cut up a dead cedar from my property into big pieces to line the perimeter of the garden. He and his son Matthe helped me move big rocks from the woods to build steps for rainwater to cascade into the bottom.

The area was ready for plants. I bought plants that can tolerate water and drought and are deer resistant. Problem was, my neighborhood deer did not know how to read signs and mistook the nursery labels with the deer crossed out on it as an invitation for dinner. They ate lavender, echinacea and even the blueberry bush. After spending a small fortune feeding the deer, I tossed out the literature for rain gardens and changed tactics. I dug up daisies, wild geraniums and milkweed from the woods and the side of the road. I transplanted catmint from other areas. I sent out an SOS to my friends for cuttings of plants that deer stay away from in their yards. I received burning bush and bee balm from Sue Mackson. Lorraine Laufer contributed primrose and forsythia. Carol Krail donated a butterfly bush. Deer enjoyed the burning bush and forsythia. The primrose, bee balm and burning bush are quite happy.

I found that critters do not like plants from the alum family. Chives and wild onions survived. I do not pull out any grass or weeds that look pretty. I used wood chips from the tree cutting as mulch. I found this was a mistake for the bottom of my rain garden when the base filled with water and the chips floated to the top. When the water receded, I had chips all over the plants on the side and bottom of the saucer.

This year, I covered some of the plants in my rain garden with the deer netting. Butterflies and honeybees can go through it, but the deer cannot. I have finally reached equilibrium with the deer and have a lovely garden this year. Now if only I can figure out what to do about the critter who ate the three beautiful yellow primrose blossoms overnight.

Next: Solar system performance.



Lalita Malik's rain garden includes grass or weeds that look pretty as well as plants not desirable to deer.
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The rain garden initially included some plants that deer enjoyed eating.



Neighbors helped Malik create the rain garden in her yard.



Lalita Malik

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