



Rain Garden captures storm water runoff

By Gary Luster

With California in the midst of a severe drought, water has become a premium commodity. Realizing this, one agency, known as The Bay Foundation, has stepped up to address the need for water conservation, in the form of rain gardens.

A rain garden is a depression that you direct storm water runoff to allow it to soak back into the ground before it reaches the storm drains.

"It looks like a dry creek bed," said Ivan Medel, watershed programs manager for The Bay Foundation. "It's lined with rocks, it has a lot more natural looking features but the essential feature of it is to capture that rain water and allow it to soak back into the ground."

There are several beneficial uses for rain gardens, according to Medel. For one thing, they are planted using nothing but native drought-tolerant plants such as sages and yarrow which require little or no potable (drinkable) water. In addition, Medel said rain gardens also aid in the cleansing of local coastal surface waters.

Normally, homeowners want

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to get storm water off of their property as quickly as possible and into storm drains to prevent flooding.

However, in the dry season when there is no rain, residents get a large buildup of brake dust and oil and grease and all of these different pollutants on all of the roads and in the storm drain systems. When it rains, Medel says that all of those different pollutants get washed out toward the beach and get washed into the Santa Monica Bay.

"By capturing that water and not allowing it to reach the storm drains and soak back into the ground, we're reducing the amount of polluted water that's reaching the Santa Monica Bay and the beaches," Medel said.

Costs for the rain garden vary depending on how many plants are used and how elaborate and ornate you would like to make your rain garden. However, it's not a cheap process. A basic rain garden can cost

anywhere between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to install.

Funding for the installations is through the metropolitan water district. The Bay Foundation was awarded a \$50,000 grant through their Innovative Conservation Program.

The money was awarded due to The Bay Foundation's rain barrel program they conducted in 2012 where they installed 400 rain barrels at homes throughout Culver City. The program's success in conserving water led to their development of the rain garden program.

The Bay Foundation has planted a total of seven rain gardens over the past few years, with three of them having been installed within the last three months and all within Culver City. The most recent rain garden was installed July 18 in West Los Angeles. This marked the fourth rain garden installed this year.

The concept of capturing rainwater and using it in new and innovative ways has been around for centuries, but here in Culver City, it is one of the

lesser-known water conservation alternatives.

To make people more aware of rain gardens, Medel and The Bay Foundation host large hands-on volunteer events. These events are attended by a wide array of interested parties from university agriculture majors to local residents who want a rain garden installed on their property but want to see how it all works beforehand.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is encouraging all residents to participate, offering \$3.75 per square foot to residents who are willing to convert their grass garden into a rain garden.

"We host large volunteer events for the rain garden installations so we go through several different university outlets and a lot of our different non-profit partners," Medel said. "We let them know so if anyone is interested in these different types of landscapes, they can come out and see how to do it and participate."

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