A discussion about Rain Gardens
with Ginny Veach MG’05 (11/11/17)

Thank you Pamela Berstler, https://greengardensgroup.com/g3-faq/. She teaches a wonderful class titled “The Watershed Approach to Landscaping”. The notes below are based on her class.

**Ultimate goal** – to have your garden be your own personal mini-watershed, retaining all the rainfall that falls on it to nourish your own plants.
Steps to get there:
- Build healthy living soil – a soil sponge
- Capture rainwater
- Use climate-appropriate plants
- Use efficient irrigation when necessary

Building a rain garden can help you reach this ultimate goal!

**How to design a rain garden:**

1. **Evaluate your site – make a site plan**
2. **Check soil drainage with a percolation test**

Dig hole the size of a one gallon pot near where you plan to put the rain garden. 
Fill with water & note how long it takes to drain completely. (soil is now saturated) 
Fill it again & note time to drain (Lay stick across hole and measure from top of water to stick every hour.)

- If more than 4 inches per hour _sand! Add organic matter to improve soil.
- If less than 1 inch per hour _brick! Try sheet mulching to improve soil.
- If 1 inch to 4 inches per hour _a soil sponge! Hooray!

**Other ways to improve the soil sponge**

- Loose by pressing pitchfork into soil,
- If heavy clay, auger holes and fill with good compost. Water thoroughly.

3. **Contour land to hold the first inch of rain after a dry period**

Calculate water from each downspout for 1” rain: (Area roof covers in square ft) X (1/12 ft of rain) = (water in cubic ft)

**Example** from above plan for four downspouts = (24’ x 36’) x (1/12 ft) = 72
- Divide this by 4 for one downspout = 72/4 = 18 cubic feet
- So... rain garden for one downspout has to be shaped to hold 18 cubic feet of water!
- Remove 18 cubic feet of soil and use it to build up berms around the perimeter of each rain garden. Slope garden soil to draw water 5 to 9 feet from buildings and 3 feet from sidewalks.
- Install flexible drain pipe if needed to route water into the rain garden.

4. **Plant with microclimates and mature plant size in mind**

- Consider sun and shade conditions, mature plant height and width.
- Choose drought tolerant plants to minimize summer water. (California natives, Mediterranean)
- Good places to browse for plants: [www.lasplitas.com](http://www.lasplitas.com), [www.yerbabuenanursery.com](http://www.yerbabuenanursery.com)

CA Native Plants were used in this garden, which receives morning sun & afternoon shade:

- 3 Berberis repens - Creeping barberry (2h x 5w)
- 3 Salvia spathacea – Hummingbird sage (2h x 3w)
- 2 Iris fernaldii – Fernald’s iris (1h x 2w)