

## Using Your Yard to Reduce Flooding and Pollution

### The Runoff Problem

Storm water running off hard surfaces in Worthington contributes to flooding and water pollution. During large rain events, runoff from impervious surfaces like streets, driveways and parking lots, can overload storm sewers causing localized street flooding. This storm water is not treated. Pollution dissolved or suspended in the water is carried downhill to Lake Okabena or a stream running to Lake Ocheda or Heron Lake.

Fortunately, Worthington residents can do their part to protect and improve the quality of water in area lakes and streams. Practices that keep rain in your yard will reduce the volume of water in storm sewers and the amount of pollution transported to water bodies. Following are some suggestions.

### Reduce Impervious Surfaces

Rain falling onto healthy lawns and well-planned landscaped areas is used by plants or infiltrates into the ground. The yard's vegetation and soil prevent erosion and remove dust and nutrients. In contrast, rain falling onto impervious surfaces, like roofs, driveways and parking lots, is not absorbed, and often flows directly into streets and storm sewers. Hard surfaces do not filter water, so pollution moves downstream.

These problems are reduced by minimizing the size of impervious surfaces in your yard and increasing the size of areas planted to grasses, gardens, shrubs and trees.

### Capture and Use Roof Water

Rain gutter downspouts often drain to impervious surfaces that connected to streets, storm sewers, lakes and streams. Rain barrels can be used to capture downspout water and store it for future use.

Rain barrels were once common in yards and gardens. Many were removed because they were considered old fashioned and it was easier use a garden hose to water plants. Public health officials also cautioned people that open topped rain barrels were breeding grounds for disease carrying mosquitoes.



Modern Rain  
Barrels  
Capture, Filter,  
Store and  
Dispense Roof  
Water



Rain barrels are back in style among gardeners and conservation minded homeowners. Modern rain barrels are attractive and have covers that keep out mosquitoes. Many new barrels have spigots for connecting garden hoses. They are a convenient and free source of soft water for gardens and flowers.

### Capture and Treat Runoff

Rain gardens capture and treat runoff from parking lots, driveways, roofs and other impervious surfaces. Water entering them both soaks into the ground and is used by flowers, grasses and shrubs. Nutrients trapped by the soil are fertilizer for the garden's plants.

Well-planned rain gardens contain attractive plants chosen for their ability to withstand both dry and wet conditions and remove pollutants.



Cost-share covering up to 75% of rain garden construction costs is available from the Heron Lake and Okabena-Ocheda watershed districts. The Nobles Soil and Water Conservation District and Natural Resources Conservation Service office offers free rain garden planning assistance. For more information on financial assistance and rain garden design, contact the conservation office at 507-376-9150 Extension 3.



Many websites contain information on rain garden design, plants, costs and more. One of the best sites is [www.bluethumb.org](http://www.bluethumb.org).