

# GREEN STREETS

## Rain Garden Care Tips

Best practices to help your garden manage rainwater year-round!



## What is a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is a vegetated space that captures, cleans, and soaks rainwater into the ground. Also known as bioretention gardens, they are designed and engineered as part of the City's rainwater management system, helping to improve water quality and reduce the amount of rainwater runoff in our pipe system. They are typically located in corners of street intersections, helping slow traffic, increase urban green space, and beautify the neighbourhood!

## How does the garden work?



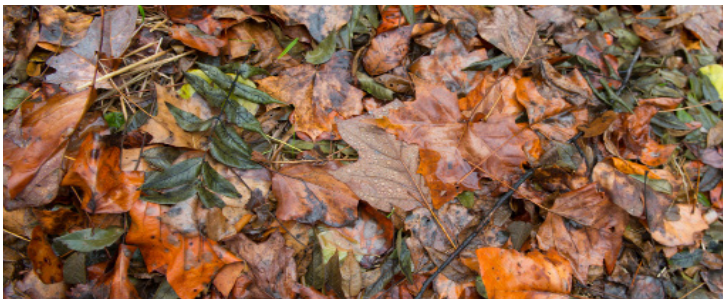
- 1 Inlet**  
An opening along the curb allows rainwater to enter the garden from the streets.
- 2 River Rock**  
Slows down water and prevents soil erosion in the garden bed
- 3 Ponding Area**  
Shallow area that allows water to safely pond while it slowly absorbs into the ground.
- 4 Soil**  
Soils help to remove rainwater pollutants as water soaks into the ground
- 5 Plants**  
Plants help filter pollutants out of rainwater
- 6 Composted Shredded Mulch**  
Reduces weed growth and adds nutrients to soil. Shredded mulch doesn't float away when it rains.
- 7 Outlet**  
When the garden is at capacity, rainwater will leave the garden through the catchbasin

[vancouver.ca/greenstreets](http://vancouver.ca/greenstreets)  
[green.streets@vancouver.ca](mailto:green.streets@vancouver.ca)

## Maintenance Tips

### Leaves and debris

- Limit soil compaction and avoid storing excess leaves or materials on top of the rain garden. The soil needs air pores to capture and absorb rainwater properly!
- In the fall, remove fallen leaves from your rain garden weekly to allow proper infiltration of water into the soil.
- Dispose of trash in an appropriate garbage bin and vegetation in a Green Bin.



### Sediment

- Sediment is picked up by rainwater and settles out as a fine, sand-like substance that can clog inlets and reduce how much water the rain garden can treat.
- Sediment should be removed as often as possible from the garden inlet by scooping it into a bag or bucket and disposing of it in a trash can.



### Be water wise

- Annual plants require watering in the summer months and are not recommended for rain gardens. For a splash of color, try drought tolerant, self-seeding native perennials or bulbs.
- Mulching your garden can conserve water in dry weather and discourage weeds. Since wood chip mulch can float and clog catch basin drains during heavy storms, consider using a double shredded bark mulch that binds together to form a semi-solid mat. Apply to a depth of 50-75mm and avoid crowding the trunk of any trees.

### Rain garden plants

- Rain gardens are not suitable for growing food. Rainwater, especially road runoff, may contain pollutants that are only safe for non-edible gardening activities.
- Consider leaving stalks and seed heads of perennials and grasses until spring to provide food and shelter for birds, and visual interest in the winter.
- Know your weeds! Plants that can crowd out intended species or disrupt local biodiversity should be removed. Refrain from using chemical herbicides and always remove invasive species by hand.



## FAQ

### Is it normal to see ponding or standing water?

Your rain garden is designed to capture rainwater in a shallow depression and help rainwater to slowly soak into the soil. After the end of a storm, water in a properly functioning rain garden will drain within 24 hours.

### Will it attract mosquitoes?

No. Mosquitos require a minimum of 5-7 days in standing water to mature from egg to adult. Rain gardens do not provide an adequate breeding habitat.

### How can I make sure it's working?

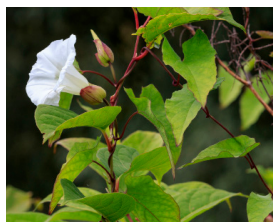
Rain gardens work best when healthy plants and vegetation cover most of the soil and when the drainage system is kept clear. Your garden's drainage system will often include an inlet (opening in the curb) and outlet (grate that sits above the soil). Keep these areas free of leaves, sediment build-up, and debris to ensure proper drainage.

**Rain gardens are a part of our Rain City Strategy.**

**Learn more at:**

[vancouver.ca/raincitystrategy](http://vancouver.ca/raincitystrategy)

## Common Weeds and Invasives



**morning glory**  
*Calystegia sepium*



**Scotch broom**  
*Cytisus scoparius*



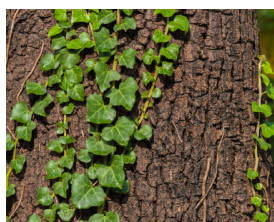
**Japanese knotweed**  
*Fallopia japonica*



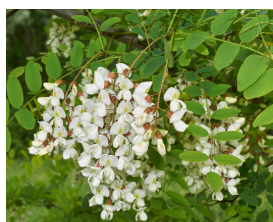
**English holly**  
*Ilex aquifolium*



**spurge laurel**  
*Daphne laureola*



**English ivy**  
*Hedera helix*



**black locust**  
*Robinia pseudoacacia*



**Himalayan blackberry**  
*Rubus armeniacus*

For more information on how to reduce the spread of horticulturally invasive plants in BC:

[bcinvasives.ca/resources/programs/plant-wise](http://bcinvasives.ca/resources/programs/plant-wise)

## Call 3-1-1 or report using the Van311 app if you find:

- Persistent invasive weed species
- Biohazards, hazardous spills or materials that could negatively affect rainwater
- Problems with damaged curb, inlet, or catch basin
- Ponding for more than 24 hours after a storm event
- Excessive erosion

**Download the Van311 app**  
[vancouver.ca/van311](http://vancouver.ca/van311)

## Maintenance Tips

Many of the maintenance activities for a rain garden are similar to taking care of any other street garden. Look for key differences below:

Activity	Required Action	How Often?	When?
Trash + Debris	Remove trash + debris (including leaf litter) from the inlets, catch basin grates and garden.	Monthly and after every major storm	All year
Erosion Repair	With a hard rake, re-grade any surface erosion caused by heavy flow of rainwater. Planting hardy groundcover plants can also prevent erosion.	After every major storm	All year
Dirt and Sediment Removal	Using a trowel and gloves, scoop sediment in and around the inlet into a bag and dispose of it in a garbage bin.	Monthly	All year, during dry weather
Planting	Be water wise! Plant in the spring or fall for establishment of new vegetation to reduce watering.	As needed	March- April October- November
Weeding	Try to catch weeds early. Remove any undesired plants and ALL invasive species.	Monthly	Spring, summer and fall
Cutting back + Pruning	Prune back perennials + shrubs to meet plant height requirements of the Boulevard Gardening Guidelines.	As needed	Fall, winter and spring
Fertilizing	Avoid using synthetic fertilizers. Boost fertility with compost instead.	As needed (every 2-3 years)	Spring or fall

## Gardening Safety

- Review all Green Streets' material, like the "Safe Gardening on Streets" guidelines
- Always wear cut resistant gloves when working in bioretention gardens