



# Rain Garden Maintenance Guide



Congratulations on your rain garden! This practice is part of a community-wide effort to manage stormwater in a way that protects and conserves our water resources. As with any garden, some routine maintenance will help keep it looking good and soaking up water and nutrients!

We've provided this handy maintenance guide to help you get started. More detailed information about rain gardens and maintenance is available from:

Be CreekSmart™ | [CreekSmart.org](http://CreekSmart.org)  
 City of Durham - Rain Catchers | [bit.ly/RainCatchers](http://bit.ly/RainCatchers)  
 NC Cooperative Extension | [www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/raingarden](http://www.bae.ncsu.edu/topic/raingarden)

Maintenance Schedule	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
Watering		Weekly until established		
Plants & Weeding	As needed throughout the year - weeding more often takes less time			
Mulching (every other year)		After last frost in Spring		After first frost in Fall
Cleaning Leaves & Debris	After leaves drop in Fall or whenever debris builds up			
Mowing Around Garden		As needed - keep clippings out of garden!		

## Watering

Water thoroughly, deeply, once weekly for the first couple of seasons until your plants become established. Once your rain garden is established you should not need to water except during long dry periods without rain. Use harvested rainwater from a cistern or rain barrel whenever possible!

## Weeding & Mowing Around Garden

Remove weeds monthly until your rain garden is established. Weeding often will take less time and help your plants compete with weeds. Weeds will decrease considerably as the plants in your garden grow. If you need to mow around the garden, keep grass clippings out of the garden since they can spread weeds.

## Plants

As your garden grows, you may need to prune back some of the plants if they are over-shading the garden or choking-out desirable plants. Some plants may be divided and used elsewhere if they have out-grown their space.

If you notice that a plant is not doing well it may need to be moved to a different location. Consider the soil and light conditions of the current location and try replanting elsewhere in the garden with different conditions.

Keep deadhead grasses and dormant plants through the winter to attract birds and beneficial insects. You may cut them back in the spring.



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Be CreekSmart™ | Visit [CreekSmart.org](http://CreekSmart.org) for more info!



## *Mulching*

Every two years add 3 inches of hardwood mulch to your rain garden. Mulch should be applied after the first frost in Fall (around Halloween) or after the last frost in Spring (around Easter). You may need to apply mulch at other times if you have areas of erosion or bare soil in the garden. Don't use pine bark mulch as it will float away! Save yourself a trip to the store by replacing soil, cobble stone, or even plants the same time you are adding mulch.

Mulch is important because it will help your plants retain moisture and it will inhibit weed growth. Mulch will naturally decay, settle, or move around as your garden grows and experiences large rain storms. Minimize the amount you walk inside the mulched area since this will compact the soil and reduce your garden's ability to naturally absorb rain water.

## *Cleaning Leaves & Debris*

Clear leaves from your rain garden after they drop in the Fall. Also clear leaves, debris, and dirt that built up in the gutters and pipes that feed the rain garden. You may have to do this more often if you have overhanging trees or areas of heavy erosion. This is a good time to check that the cobble stones of your garden are clean and in place. Clear debris and adjust the cobble stones where the gutters and pipes empty into the garden and where the garden overflows.

## *Fertilizer*

### **PLEASE DO NOT FERTILIZE YOUR RAIN GARDEN!**

The native plants chosen for your garden are adapted to our local soils and the conditions in your yard. These plants will naturally absorb the nutrients they need as they soak up stormwater. Once established they will create a beautiful, drought-resistant, low-maintenance landscape that does not need extra nitrogen and phosphorous from fertilizers.

### **LOCAL SOURCES FOR NATIVE PLANTS**

We love native plants because they are well-suited to the local environment and do not spread weeds seeds throughout our watershed. Here are some local sources for native plants:

*Stone Brothers & Byrd – Durham* ([stonebrothers.com](http://stonebrothers.com)).

They have a great selection of native plants, knowledgeable staff, and are conveniently located in heart of the Ellerbe Creek Watershed in Downtown Durham (across from the Durham Athletic Park).

*Durham Garden Center – West Durham* ([www.durhamgardencenter.com](http://www.durhamgardencenter.com))

Friendly, knowledgeable staff who are focused on sustainable gardening through native plants, rain gardens, and sourcing local products.

*Niche Gardens – Chapel Hill* ([nichegardens.com](http://nichegardens.com))

Their nursery has an impressive collection of native plants and knowledgeable staff to guide you.

*NC Botanical Garden – Chapel Hill* ([ncbg.unc.edu/plants-and-gardening](http://ncbg.unc.edu/plants-and-gardening))

These folks have a wealth of information on native plants and have a variety available for purchase.

*Southern States – Carrboro, Creedmoor, Mebane* ([www.southernstates.com](http://www.southernstates.com))

Good selection of native plants with several locations in the Triangle.

*Lowe's and Home Depot – Several locations in the Triangle* ([lowes.com](http://lowes.com) | [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com))

Selection and knowledge of native plants can vary across locations. It is helpful to know specifically what you need since some staff may not be as experienced in native plants compared to specialty garden stores.