

Rock Hill Touts Rain Gardens

Rock Hill joins York County push for water quality

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Melissa Cherry - mcherry@heraldonline.com - - Duane Christopher kneels in the rain garden at his Rock Hill home. The city is encouraging residents and others in the community to plant rain gardens to improve water quality, with the 1,000 Rain Gardens of York County initiative.

Rock Hill -- The city of Rock Hill's 2020 Comprehensive Plan includes encouraging residents, churches, schools, businesses and community groups to install rain gardens in their yards.

That goal got a little more within reach during a press conference Friday at Glencairn Garden.

The city, in partnership with neighboring municipalities and organizations, kicked off an effort to register 1,000 rain gardens across York County. Also involved in the countywide initiative are the cities of Tega Cay and Fort Mill, the York Soil and Water Conservation District, the Master Gardeners of York County, the Culture and Heritage Museums, the Clemson Extension Service and S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

A rain garden is a shallow, planted depression that absorbs excess water into the ground from impervious surfaces such as roofs and driveways, rather than allowing it to enter storm drains and surface waters.

It's all in an effort to improve water quality, said Ann McGovern, the Catawba Watershed manager with DHEC.

As cities and towns develop, more of these impervious surfaces are created, McGovern said. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, an impervious surface of a city block can generate up to five times more run-off water than wooded areas of the same size." So you can imagine what that does to our water quality," McGovern said.

"All of that water comes off lawns, roofs, sidewalks into the nearest storm drain and into the nearest stream without being treated. That water picks up pollutants, fertilizers, pesticides, oil. All of that runs off into our streams."

With rain gardens, however, the run-off is filtered into the ground, and plants and soil keep it from the waterways.

"By slowing down the volume of water and keeping it in the ground, it also helps reduce local flooding," she said. "Rain gardens are really a beautiful way to landscape your lawn. They attract wildlife like birds and bees and butterflies while, at the same time, providing a wonderful water quality benefit, protecting one of the most natural resources we have here in the county."

York County Councilman Chad Williams asked everyone to close their eyes and picture their most favorite place.

"How many of you pictured yourself inside?" he asked. "To me, that was a big impact of why this is important: protecting the environment," he said.

As a former member on Rock Hill's planning commission, Williams remembered dealing with the problem of stormwater run-off. Eventually a retention pond was built to catch it, but he said he's glad to see new ways of dealing with the run-off.

"We all rely on good water quality, and rain gardens can help improve that, both inside and out," he said. "Everybody can make a difference."

Susie Hinton, a Rock Hill City Council member, commended everyone for taking on the challenge, saying she had become more aware of the importance of water quality.



Duane Christopher, of Duane F. Christopher & Associates, which specializes in landscape architecture, attended the press conference, but the concept of a rain garden isn't new to him.

He has one of his own, and he's worked with them for years, although in the past they've been called biofilters or bioorientations.

"Rain garden is probably a more recent term in the last 10 years," he said. "They mimic environmental principals that natural wetlands are."

Retention ponds, like the one council member Williams mentioned, might help with water quantity, Christopher said, but rain gardens lead to the next step: water quality. He said people who do want to build a rain garden should plan it carefully and correctly, or it could overgrow and become too difficult to maintain.

Christopher suggested native grasses and plants, such as Louisiana irises, hibiscuses and Texas star hibiscuses.

Read more: <http://www.heraldonline.com/11011/07/01/11MXC11VI/city-touts-rain-gardens.html#ixzz1lOzxdvW11>