FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK

The Forest Hill Park Post

May 2018

President	Patricia Wood
Vice President	Terry Fitzgerald
Treasurer	Lee Shewmake
Secretary	Carolyn Paulette

www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

Rain Gardens

Bill Shanabruch

If you are looking for a way to improve local water quality, support wildlife, and create a beautiful landscape, it's time to consider a **rain garden**. At its simplest, a rain garden is a landscaped area that includes a slight depression surrounded by a low berm. There is also an "entrance" where water from a downspout, driveway or other source of stormwater runoff can gain access to the rain garden. The depression traps the stormwater and then allows it to infiltrate slowly into the ground. Pollutants are filtered out; groundwater is recharged; and less polluted runoff enters your local creek. When properly constructed, the water will not pool in the rain garden for more than 1-2 days. This is not nearly enough time for mosquitoes to breed which takes at least 7 days.

There are many great resources for helping do-it-yourselfers construct their own rain garden and some of these are provided at the end of the article. In addition, there are local landscapers who are qualified to do the job. Whether doing the project yourself or hiring a contractor, there are a host of considerations to think about to maximize the benefits of a rain garden. The first step is to know where your stormwater goes. Some downspouts may not contribute very much to water quality problems because the water is already directed to landscaped areas that infiltrate the water. But perhaps there is a downspout that quickly directs rainwater to the street where it enters the stormwater system and carries excess water to your local creek. Directing water from the latter downspout to a rain garden would be perfect. Just make sure the rain garden is located at least 10 feet from any foundation.

This drawing illustrates the various components of rain gardens and where these gardens offer the greatest benefit. Rain water from the driveway and the downspouts flows into the garden.

All of the rain garden manuals provide simple directions for calculating how large and how deep your rain garden should be. And you are highly encouraged to follow these directions. However, here are a few useful generalizations about rain gardens in the Richmond area. A rain garden that is approximately 100 square feet in surface area can usually handle most of the water from one downspout. And the deeper you are willing to dig, the more effective the rain garden will be. Unfortunately, our soils contain a lot of clay and are notoriously slow at infiltrating stormwater. That means we have to dig a little deeper (18 inches is ideal) around here to make the rain garden function well. And it is also a good idea to replace the existing soil with about 12 inches of "bioretention mix". Biore-

tention mix is just a fancy name for a mixture that is very permeable due to high sand content (at least 50%). About 4-6 inches is then left below the berm for the "ponding" area.

Plants are the next important component of the rain garden. And plant selection for rain gardens is a little trickier than for other landscaped areas. Plants in the main portion of the rain garden must be able to withstand "wet feet" periodically as well as handle dry, hot summers. Fortunately, we are very lucky in the Richmond area because there is a diverse array of native plants that work great in rain gardens. (See links below.) You can choose endless combinations of perennial flowers, grasses, shrubs, and small trees. The root systems of these native perennials are deep and capable of penetrating into the clay layer at the base of the rain garden. Over time, these plants will help the rain garden function even better by creating pathways for the water to infiltrate. They will also attract pollinators and support local wildlife.

The next step is to add mulch to help retain moisture during dry conditions. The mulch will also improve the soil over time as it breaks down. Maintenance requirements of rain gardens can be quite minimal. You will probably have to water the plants during the first summer to help them get established; but they should be self-sufficient after that unless there is a brutal drought. No need for watering or fertilizers – those deep root systems take care of that. Occasional weeding is required to keep out unwanted plants that germinate from seeds carried by wind, water, or animals. And it is a good idea to replace the mulch every two years to help choke out weeds.

Low maintenance means you can sit back and enjoy the beautiful landscape and the wildlife it has attracted. Don't be shy – give a rain garden a try.

Rain Garden Manuals

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay: http://www.stormwater.allianceforthebay.org/take-action/installations/rain-gardens

James River Association: https://jrava.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Rain-Garden.pdf

Fairfax County: https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/sites/soil-water-conservation/files/assets/documents/raingardenbk.pdf

Virginia Department of Forestry: http://dof.virginia.gov/infopubs/Rain-Garden-Technical-Guide-2014-05_pub.pdf

Native Plants for Rain Gardens

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay: https://www.slideshare.net/Sotirakou964/va-native-plants-for-rain-gardens-alliance-for-the-chesapeake-bay

Northern Virginia Regional Commission: https://novaregion.org/DocumentCenter/View/10930

The Forest Hill Spring Classic

The first annual Forest Hill Spring Classic took place Sunday, April 15th, in Forest Hill Park. The event was co-sponsored by Friends of Forest Hill Park and Coqui Cyclery.

Leading up to race day, Coqui offered free training sessions. The training sessions were a lot of fun and provided race participants of all ages a chance to get tips from experienced bikers.

More than 100 youngsters registered to race on April 15th. The age range was 2 through 14 and there were four race categories kids could choose from depending upon their skill level and age. The youngest riders were on strider bikes, which have no pedals and are moved by foot power. Each rider who finished a race received a medal. First, second and third place riders received prizes.

The excitement level was indescribable and it was hard to tell who had more fun – the youngsters or the adults. Adding to the fun was a face painter, a juggler and an animal balloon artist. Food vendors were present with barbecue, ice cream and more. A passing dark cloud and light rain shower did not deter the good spirits and enjoyment of the crowd.

Park Champions

March 24th was a great work day for invasive plant warriors in Forest Hill Park. The group LeadHership from VCU was well represented. English ivy was removed from tree trunks as well as the ground in three different areas. Thanks to all who continue to remove one invasive plant at a time!

~~~~~~

On April 21st, volunteers from Friends of Forest Hill Park manned five separate entrances to the park for three hours. They counted visitors entering the park. The five entrances were selected by city of Richmond Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities and their goal is to have actual numbers of visitors which will assist them with staffing and other budgetary items.

The totals were revealing, particularly broken down by hour. The volunteers manned their posts between 9:00 am and noon. The busiest hour at each of the five entrances was 10—11. The total for the three hour period was 4,250!

This actual count is of value to PRCF to help them make a case for additional staff, funds and amenities which the community will ultimately enjoy. We give major thanks to volunteers Terry Fitzgerald, Mary Godsey, Carolyn Paulette, Dwight and Pat Wood.

~~~~~~