

West Windsor's WWCP Rain Garden

Our Ultimate "Win-Win"

We've all heard of "win-win" scenarios. West Windsor created a win-win that benefits both our Community Park visitors as well as the environment. The Community Park problem was a persistent water flow from under the paved skateboard court. This water created gullies on the lawn and accumulated water on the walking path. The West Windsor Environmental Commission wanted to solve this problem in an environmentally friendly way. The solution to this problem (our "win") was the recruitment of resident experts to design, implement and maintain a rain garden; a rain garden populated with native plants. We both eliminated the water situation and improved the park.



Steffen Parratt, who initiated and led the project in fulfillment of his *Rutgers Environmental Stewards* program requirements notes, "A rain garden is a depressed area in the landscape that collects rainwater and allows it to soak into the ground. Planted with grasses and flowering perennials, rain gardens help reduce runoff, filter pollutants, and provide food and shelter for bees, birds, butterflies, and other wildlife." Further background on Steffen's studies may be found at <https://envirostewards.rutgers.edu/>.

He continues, "In constructing the rain garden, we removed a substantial amount of the native clay soil and replaced it with 10 cubic yards of coarse sand, creating an aquifer. Layers of soil and compost were then added on top of the sand. Volunteers planted a variety of grasses and flowering perennials and then covered the garden with a layer of mulch."

After Steffen prepared the structural requirements for the rain garden, plants needed to be selected and purchased. Here is where Paula Bal, our gardening expert, came to bear. Paula and Steffen had the help of several community volunteers including Angela Castano Diez and Corinna Storino. Paula chose a variety of native plants and set these out, initially on paper, to match Steffen's layout. Plant layouts



considered how tall each will grow; how much space is needed between plants and growing conditions. This past Memorial Day weekend Environmental Commission members and volunteers Ephraim Buhks, Elliot Gordon, Andrea Mandel, Michael Stevens, and Angela Castano Diez helped Paula and Steffen plant each at its proper depth. There are three distinct growing zones in the rain garden, dry, moist, and wet areas- the plants were chosen, and the layout was based on these planting zones.



Councilwoman Andrea Mandel, who is a past Vice Chair of the WW Environmental Commission as well as former Council Liaison, said “This has long been a problem water area, and I have been pushing for several years to not only solve it but to create a prominent West Windsor Township demonstration rain garden to show residents and businesses an environmentally friendly way to solve localized water issues. It was a small, sloped area and would not be easy. Steffen did not give up and tried many different designs to make this work. I am thrilled that instead of a system of piping to move the water elsewhere we now have a beautiful native plant garden to absorb the excess water and recharge the ground water. Please come out and see it and get ideas for your own property.”

Names of many of these native plants should be familiar to you. They include goldenrod, Liatris, coneflower, aster, sedge, iris, milkweed and blue indigo, Paula selected a total of 17 different species. After they were laid out on the prepared bed, each at their proper spacing.



As with the pollinator garden, a short distance away, volunteers will periodically weed and maintain the plants. Please contact Dan Dobromilsky, our township landscape architect, if you wish to participate in the maintenance of these gardens (609-799-2400 x 227).

For more information about installing your own pollinator and rain garden, please check out the West Windsor Environmental Commission webpage at <https://www.westwindsornj.org/boards-committees/environmental-commission>.

