

Mount Joy Borough Cultivates Community Pride through Rain Garden
By Lynda Ginsparg

Spring Ahead with a WREN Grant and Create a Water-friendly Project in Your Community

“We wanted to make something that was hands-on that the community could participate in from start to finish. It was a great way to engage the community, and that’s what we achieved,” Stacie Gibbs, Zoning and Code Officer, Mount Joy Borough.

Rain gardens are an efficient and beautiful way to stave off the effects of polluting run-off from roofs, parking lots and impervious surfaces. Rain gardens have been growing in popularity, and during the past several years WREN has awarded many grants to local partnerships to create and install rain gardens in their communities.

In Mount Joy Borough, a WREN project aptly named ‘**A Blooming Good Idea**’ has blossomed into an educational storm water management project at the Borough’s recently completed community rain garden.



The Mount Joy Borough rain garden began life as a blank canvas adjacent to the borough offices.



The completed Mount Joy Borough rain garden is now a source of pride and a thing of beauty for the entire community.

This functional rain garden demonstration site, which was constructed and planted in August 2013, is adjacent to the Mount Joy Borough offices and is a 24’ by 24’ patch of ground that handles stormwater runoff from the

**NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION:
DEFINITION FROM U.S. EPA:**

Unlike pollution from industrial and sewage treatment plants, nonpoint source (NPS) pollution comes from many diffuse sources. NPS pollution is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground. As the runoff moves, it picks up and carries away natural and human-made pollutants, finally depositing them into lakes, rivers, wetlands, coastal waters and ground waters.

Nonpoint source pollution can include:

- Excess fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides from agricultural lands and residential areas
- Oil, grease and toxic chemicals from urban runoff and energy production
- Sediment from improperly managed construction sites, crop and forest lands, and eroding stream banks
- Salt from irrigation practices and acid drainage from abandoned mines
- Bacteria and nutrients from livestock, pet wastes and faulty septic systems
- Atmospheric deposition and hydromodification

changes in their everyday behavior as it related to decreasing the volume of stormwater run-off and improving water quality and ground water recharge as a result of the information received during the workshop. Many of those attending showed interest in installing a rain garden or some other type of storm water management solution on their property.

Goals of the Rain Garden Project

The inspiration for the project was to utilize the rain garden as a way to promote behavior change. *“We wanted to make something that was hands-on that the community could participate in from start to finish. It was a great way to engage the community, and that’s what we achieved,”* Gibbs said. The rain garden was constructed with the help of Borough staff and a trove of

building’s roof. There is a secondary overflow rain garden, measuring 4’ by 16’, located adjacent to the first one, designed to capture and filter runoff from the parking lot; it also captures overflow from the larger garden (there is a storm sewer inlet in this portion of the garden.) This two stage rain garden design was planned from the start, according to Stacie Gibbs, Zoning and Code Officer for Mount Joy Borough. Gibbs has served as coordinator for the project along with Ken Barto, inspector of construction and the assistant zoning and code officer for the Borough. Barto, who is a 35-year veteran employee of the Borough, also serves as the coordinator for the Mount Joy Emergency Management Agency. Both Stacie and Ken attended WREN’s project leader training last June in Carlisle.

In addition to constructing the rain garden, another component of the project included hosting educational workshops to provide participants with a ‘how-to’ manual on rain gardens, and offering a discount on professional garden design services for those who might be interested in having a rain garden constructed on their property. An interactive worksheet on ‘how to size your rain garden’ was deemed one of the most valuable pieces of information shared during the workshop, according to evaluations received following the presentations. Many participants envisioned making



Monica Billig, Program Manager with the Environmental Finance Center at the University of Maryland, gets ready to do some serious planting in the rain garden. “They were huge supporters of this project,” according to Stacie Gibbs, the Borough’s zoning and code officer.

community volunteers, who will help maintain the garden on an on-going basis.

Gibbs said the needs of Mount Joy are the needs of all of the surrounding municipalities: **to protect the water supply and ground water recharge**, and in the specific case of Mount Joy, **to minimize sedimentation** into Little Chiques Creek, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay.

RAIN GARDEN:
A depressed garden that uses mulch, soil, and deep-rooted native plants to capture, absorb and infiltrate stormwater.

“We wanted the community to understand why we were doing this. It gives them an option to conserve and minimize pollutants that can get to the creek and the bay,” she added.

Gibbs said the project plans called for the downspouts to be detached from the borough building. Previously, the downspouts had been going directly into a storm pipe that led into an inlet that carried stormwater into the waters of the Commonwealth.

A model for the greater community

“In order to minimize pollutants, the rain garden was a great option – the role model for us. We knew we could be the first step in serving as the model for the greater community,” Gibbs said, adding that downspouts have now been redirected under borough sidewalks into the rain garden. Run-off from the roof now also goes into the rain garden.



Top and bottom photos: Local girl scouts were among the many volunteers who took part in planting the greenery that became part of the rain garden. (Selected photos, as noted, courtesy of Scott Hershey, Mount Joy Borough Manager.)

Gibbs described the rain garden as a best management practice in storm water. She said the vision was to create an educational tool that would allow the community to learn about different plants that will be utilized for years to come. Interpretive signage will be installed this spring to include information about the plants in the garden and

provide easily understood information about a rain garden.

“Spring is when things are really going to take off. We’ll see a lot of projects going on in residential properties, and we have received some phone calls from commercial entities who are interested in rain gardens,” Gibbs said.

Future Plans

While planning and construction took center stage during the first phase of the project, Gibbs said the focus now turns to community outreach. One step toward that goal has already been achieved: the **Mount Joy Historical Society** has asked to include the Borough’s rain garden on the list for its annual **Tour of Gardens**.

Gibbs said she is planning to meet with the project’s partners to see if they are interested in holding another workshop. *“I think we could get a lot of participants who weren’t able to attend the other workshops. The rain garden is here now, so it will be a tool that we can use during the workshop,”* she said, adding that one way to engage the public would be to solicit their help in replacing some plants or doing some other minor work in the garden.

She said from the beginning, the partners were very open to the project and enthusiastically volunteered their time and services. *“We’re really grateful for that,”* Gibbs said. *“They attended the rain garden installation, they got their hands dirty and they continue to support us.”* Gibbs said she fully expects the project partners to remain involved after the grant period is over this summer, noting that they continue to field calls about the viability of rain garden installation from interested community members.



Mount Joy Borough Public Works Director Tom Strubel assists a Girl Scout in adding some plants to the rain garden.



Everyone got into the act: Mount Joy Borough Council President Chris Metzler lends his personal touch by adding some plants to the rain garden.

In relating her experience in working with WREN, Gibbs said, *“WREN provided support and information beyond what we expected. In terms of completing the grant application, completing reports, (giving us) ideas for workshops and examples for setting up the project, WREN was a wealth of knowledge.”*

In reflecting on the planning and implementation of the Mount Joy Borough rain garden, Gibbs summed up her thoughts this way: *“The project was more than a way to bring the community together. It is a way for the community to invest in their environment. It was an awesome project, well organized,”* she said.

Her words of wisdom to others who may be considering a rain garden for their communities comes in the form of some very practical advice.

Final Thoughts for a Successful Project

“I would advise a municipality or organization that is interested in constructing a rain garden, or any project for that matter, to make sure that whomever they choose as a partner(s), to make sure that the partners are completely vested, (that they) have the time to participate and fully understand the goals of the project. We feel that is one of the biggest reasons why this project was a success,” Gibbs concluded.

Source of funding for the above project: *The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania Citizen Education Fund through a Growing Greener Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.*

Project details:

Lead Project Partner: Borough of Mount Joy, Lancaster, County, PA

Contact: Stacie Gibbs and Ken Barto, Borough of Mount Joy 717-653-2300

Project Title: *Mount Joy Borough Community Rain Garden: A Blooming Good Idea!*

WREN Grant Funding: \$4,900

Additional Partners: Mount Joy Borough Water Authority, David Christian & Associates, Inc. and Integrity Land Works

Project Description:

The partners will design and construct a functional rain garden demonstration site, including signage, at the Mount Joy Borough Office to educate officials and community residents. The partners will host two workshops and provide participants with a how-to manual and a professional garden design services discount. Officials and community residents will be encouraged to participate in the various phases of the rain garden project including design, construction and maintenance.

Consider becoming a project leader in your community! Apply for a WREN Grant.

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