

MiSustainable Holland

About this series

The MiSustainable Holland column is a collection of community voices sharing updates about local sustainability initiatives.

This Week's Sustainability Framework Theme:

Community Knowledge: The collective knowledge and energy of the community is an incredible resource that must be channeled to where it is needed.

Rainscaping offers options for lawn health and environment

By Jordan Miller
ODC Network

Every growing season presents an opportunity to reflect on how well your existing plants survived in your yard. With varying weather conditions this summer, many people have noted both dry, brown lawns as well as flooded areas.

Typical turf grass lawns have very shallow roots that cannot reach water during dry times, and the compacted soil underneath can limit the amount of water that can soak into the ground. If you would like a way to address these issues, or make other informed changes to your landscaping, consider rainscaping.

Rainscaping uses practices such as tree and native plantings, riparian buffers, rain gardens, and rain barrels help to treat the water where it falls. These practices help contain pollutants before they reach our waterways and improve overall ecosystem health.

However, rainscaping also benefits homeowners as well as the environment. The implementation of these practices can yield results such as more aesthetic lawns, less lawn maintenance, and decreased water usage.

Initially, native plantings will require regular watering as they get established. However, if your goal as a homeowner is to decrease water usage, native plantings are a great option. The roots of native plants reach much deeper than that of turf grass, thus requiring less water.

Butterfly gardens are another form of native planting. They not only require less water but also encourage pollination, while simultaneously offering aesthetic value. They are excellent for sunny patches in your yard that typically would take a lot of time and water to maintain.

Another option to conserve water is rain barrels. Rain barrels catch water that rushes from downspouts. This decreases erosion and runoff and can lower your water bill. The collected water can be used to water gardens, clean cars, flush toilets, and moisten compost.

For yards with patches of soil and flooding, a rain garden could help. Rain gardens are also a type of native planting that have all the benefits of native plantings while also decreasing flooding and erosion issues.

Initially, rainscaping requires a lot of work up front to get these practices established. However, over time, the maintenance decreases and requires less effort than typical turf lawns.

Additionally, native plantings offer aesthetic value. Lush green lawns are hard to maintain, especially in dry sunny conditions. The transfer to native plantings helps recharge the aquifer, provide aesthetic value to your lawn, and decreases maintenance and water usage.

If you would like assistance evaluating your space and learning about which rainscaping methods would work best for your site, there are two options:

First, the ODC Network provides free rainscaping site assessments and plans. A trained volunteer will listen to your concerns and goals while assessing your property and provide a detailed plan to

implement the practices that are best suited for your goals and lawn. If you are interested, fill out the Google form [here](#) or for additional information and resources contact kelly@outdoordiscovery.org or call (616) 393-9453.

Second, the ODC Network is also holding a Plan Your 2023 Native Garden Workshop 9-10:30 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 23 at DeGraaf Nature Center. Join this interactive workshop to learn more about rainscaping practices, learn which plants are suitable for your site conditions, and design layout options to have a plan in place before our next planting season. Registration is required and is available on the ODC website, at outdoordiscovery.doubleknot.com/event/plan-your-2024-native-garden-workshop/2990130.

- *Jordan Miller was a watershed intern at the ODC Network this past summer and is back at Grand Valley State University studying natural resources management and communication studies.*