

# Adopt-a-Raingarden



## Volunteer Guide



Thank you for helping us maintain our local raingardens! Our raingardens collect and clean thousands of gallons of stormwater runoff each year, but to work well they also need a bit of care. To keep them functioning well and looking great, your help goes a long way. This guide will help make the most of your time and ensure a positive result for the watershed.

## MAINTENANCE BY SEASON:

### Winter:

When snow melts, clean out sediment/soil from the inlet of the garden and other winter debris (leaves, trash, etc.) from the basin.

Cut back last year's plant growth and dispose at a compost collection.



### Spring:

Add mulch as needed, covering bare spots. Cut back last year's dead plants, divide plants as needed, repair edging as needed, weeding round one while ground is soft. Replace plants as needed.

Cut back overgrown shrubs after blooms are complete - no more than 1/3.

### Fall:

Check for weeds that may have been missed, protect sensitive or struggling plants, add mulch if needed. Leave plants standing for winter habitat and texture.



### Independence Day:

Weeding round two. A great time for photographing flowers in bloom.



Water struggling plants. Seed collecting.



### Late Summer:

Weeding round three, targeting warm season weeds that seed in mid-August.

## HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS:

1. Select a public or community-based raingarden near you.  
*See [VLAWMO.org/get-involved](http://VLAWMO.org/get-involved) for a list of available raingardens.*
2. Plan the next year according to the volunteer commitment.  
*Commitment provides a base of volunteer service, additional tasks optional.*
3. Contact VLAWMO to sign-up and get connected to the email list.  
*Emails include seasonal reminders and maintenance needs specific to your raingarden. Each raingarden has a unique partnership depending on location (i.e. school, city, or housing association).*
4. Maintain the raingarden on your schedule!

## COMMITMENT:

- 8-12 hrs/yr
- 2-3 weeding sessions and one late winter/early spring debris clean-up.
- Disposal of trash and organic debris: *Compost site, personal yard waste/trash collection, or through partnership with a city or school.*
- Observe the garden and report issues to VLAWMO.

## WEEDING:

Regular weeding is one of the biggest supports for a raingarden. If done periodically even in small intervals, the time required to maintain the garden is far less than if weeding is neglected for a season.

**Spring weeding:** When dandelions turn yellow, other weeds are soon to follow. Attacking now is most effective because it prevents weeds from strengthening their roots. This is also when the ground is soft, making weeding a breeze.

*Common weeds to watch for:* Dandelion, sweet clover, ash, elm, and buckthorn seedlings, thistles

**Fall weeding:** Warm season (Aug-Sept) weeds typically flower early to mid-August. Catching them before they go to seed saves time and makes weeding easier the following year.

*Common weeds to watch for:* Ragweed, goldenrod, crab grass, crown vetch, meadow vetchling.

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## SPRING CLEAN-UP:

Spring is the messiest time of year for raingardens. Trash, sediment, salt, and other debris has accumulated all winter and is revealed after the snow melts. Spring cleaning is the most work compared to other seasons, but it's also the most beneficial for water quality. What's removed from the raingarden is sparing local waters from pollutants and excess nutrients.

**Clean out the inlet:** Sand, soil, and compacted leaves can clog the raingarden at the point where water flows in. Shovel or sweep out the inlet so that incoming water doesn't move it further into the raingarden. Dispose in trash, as sediment accumulated from the street is contaminated with auto fluids, brake dust, salt, and other possible pollutants.

**Cut back last year's growth:** Letting native plants stand over winter allows pollinators and insects to burrow and lay eggs in the stalks, and provides food and cover for wildlife. In spring though, all dead plant material should be cut back to make space for new growth. With pruners and gloves, cut and remove dead debris. Your raingarden may have a public works staff that comes to pick up debris in bagged piles, or volunteers may be the best option for disposal. Volunteers can dispose of debris in their home yardwaste or bring it to a County compost collection. Do not cut back woody shrubs.

**Clean out basin:** Trash and leaf litter from the previous year should be cleared out so that mulch covers any surface that isn't a plant. Accumulated leaf litter can clog a raingarden's drainage. Removing leaves and composting them spares local water from excess nutrients and resulting algae blooms.

## MULCH:

Double-shredded hardwood mulch is the best mulch for raingardens. This type of mulch inter-locks and doesn't float when the raingarden fills with water. Being hardwood, it lasts longer than flat woodchips. Mulch helps hold moisture in the raingarden, and protects it against weeds.

Mulch is unique with every raingarden in VLAWMO. In many cases public entities such as schools and cities replenish mulch routinely. Other times, they will pay for new mulch for volunteers to lay. Other raingardens may require funding assistance from VLAWMO to purchase new mulch. VLAWMO will inform you of the mulch needs at your raingarden. Volunteers may opt out of mulching duties if more basic maintenance is desired.

When mulch is laid, it should be 3" thick. Keep mulch 2" away from the base of plants, to support air circulation and prevent disease. Some mulch may be needed just for spot-treatment, covering bare spots in the raingarden. The need for mulch is reduced as plants grow and mature.

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## PLANT CARE:

When plants don't survive for a variety of reasons, new plants fill the space so that weeds don't. Funding for new plants is structured the same as new mulch – VLAWMO will inform volunteers of the potentials for your raingarden and will contact volunteers to arrange planting days. Volunteers are welcome to complete optional plant care tasks throughout the year:

**Dividing:** In Spring before the plant is 4", dividing prevents the garden from getting overcrowded. A sign that dividing is needed is the sight of "o" shapes, with the plant expanding and leaving a gap in its center. Divided plants can be replanted in open spaces in the same raingarden or be brought to another raingarden in need.

**Deadheading:** Removal of dead or declining flowers. This encourages more flowers, lengthens the bloom time, and makes the garden look tidy.

**Pinching:** Cut or pinch young stems back a couple of inches to the point just above a bud or leaf. This will bring plants back bushier and more compact, and will encourage more energy to be put into root and shoot development.

**Pruning:** Fall pruning will help thicken shrubs and boost flowering shoots in Spring. Remove dead or injured branches, remove crossing or rubbing branches, and remove branches growing towards the center of the plant.

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## WATCH AND OBSERVE:

Volunteers are valuable eyes on the ground. Over time, familiarity for what to watch for will increase. Observe any changes, trends, and issues that need addressing in the raingarden. Contact VLAWMO if an issue is beyond your means of addressing.