

# Adopt-a-Raingarden



## Volunteer Guide



Thank you for helping us maintain our public raingardens! These raingardens collect and clean thousands of gallons of stormwater runoff each year. But to work well and look great, they also need a bit of care, and your help forms the team effort that makes a big impact. 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. Prune shrubs as needed.



### 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.

Trim 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. Clip and remove weed seed heads for easy removal.



### 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.  
*Look ahead at each season and plan seasonal maintenance into your schedule.*
3. Work alone or contact VLAWMO to recruit help.  
*Volunteers can either do all maintenance on their own time, as a club or organization, or invite friends and other VLAWMO volunteers to help. All participants are required to sign a VLAWMO waiver, available at [vlawmo.org/get-involved/service-opportunities](http://vlawmo.org/get-involved/service-opportunities).*
4. Uphold the volunteer commitment and renew as desired.  
*Your experience is a valuable tool to teach others and continue the tradition.*

## COMMITMENT:

- 8-12 hrs/yr.
- Minimum of 3 weeding sessions plus one late winter or one early spring debris clean-up.
- Disposal of trash and organic debris:  
*Compost site, personal yard waste/trash collection, or a partnership with a city or school.*
- Report results and hours worked. Report other issues beyond your ability to VLAWMO.
- Take photos of your progress and of people working in the garden (posed face shots - no backsides and bend-over photos please).

## 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 and going to seed. This is also when the ground is soft, making weeding a breeze.

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

**Late summer weeding:** Warm season 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, crab grass, mare's tail, crown vetch, and goldenrod (native but can be controlled).

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## SPRING CLEAN-UP:

Spring is the messiest time of year for raingardens. Trash, sediment, salt, and other debris accumulates 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 in spring also makes the rest of the year easier.

**Clean out the inlet:** Sand, soil, and compacted leaves can clog the raingarden at the entry where water flows in. Shovel or sweep out the inlet so that incoming water doesn't move it further into the raingarden. Dispose this sediment 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, dead plant material should be cut back to make space for new growth. To support pollinators, wait to do removal until temperature is consistently above 50° F. Cut and remove dead debris with pruners, gloves, or hand-held saws. Your raingadren may have a public works staff that comes to pick up piled debris, or transport to a County compost facility may be needed. Do not cut back woody shrubs, but some light pruning may be needed to freshen up 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 ideal 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 soil and sheilds against weeds (most but not all).

Mulching 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 strategy at your raingarden. Most raingardens require fresh mulch every 2-3 years.

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 to cover bare spots in the raingarden. Mulch quantity 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 the center. Divided plants can be replanted in open spaces in the same raingarden. Avoid transplanting elsewhere due to the spread of jumping worms.

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

**Pinching:** Try cutting or pinching young plant 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 the roots.

**Pruning:** Fall and winter 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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## OBSERVE AND USE RESOURCES:

Volunteers are valuable eyes on the ground. Observe any changes, trends, and issues that need addressing in the raingarden and inform VLAWMO annually. Contact VLAWMO if an issue is beyond your means of addressing. If a garden needs new plants or mulch, up to \$100 is available through the Community Blue Mini-Grant. Call (612) 204-6070 for more information.