

Exhibiting a Rain Garden

By Sean James

We get a lot of wonderful opportunities at Fern Ridge Landscaping. Over the last few years, more and more of our work has focused on what are becoming known as “rainscapes.” These are ornamental ways of handling rainfall. They can even be invisible in the case of underground infiltration trenches. There are many upsides to rainscapes, including helping to protect neighbourhoods from flooding. The number one source of insurance claims in Canada is now flood damage! Rainscapes protect our waterways, by slowing the flow of stormwater into creeks, cleaning it and cooling it as it infiltrates, improving biodiversity and adding to property value. Getting the word out about this great trend is important.

Every year we create an educational demonstration garden at the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) and this year we chose to focus on showcasing different rain handling methods. Featuring the variety of different techniques is key. Showing that it doesn't have to be a sacrifice, but rather can be even more beautiful than traditional landscaping, is a good way to get people to buy in.

Water Features

We built a lovely gazebo and then used the roof and eavestroughs as water features, pumping water up to the top and allowing it to flow into a rain barrel, a rain garden and what is known as an evaporation pond. We backed this all up with signage and it was a pleasure to see people intently reading.



▲ Mike Prong and Sean James show the final product, a rainscape at the CNE designed to educate and show people that being eco-friendly doesn't have to be a sacrifice.

Rain barrels are pretty straightforward. There are some nicer ones coming on the market now which are bit more ornamental than the old style. It's important to empty them a couple of days before it rains, to be ready to capture the next rainfall. The easiest way is to connect it to a drip irrigation hose and let the water flow and soak into the landscape. Empty and disconnect the barrels before winter.

Rain gardens are our favourite way of handling stormwater since they're so ornamental and offer the chance to plant some beautiful, unusual plants. They're simple to build. Basically, create a bowl-shaped garden, depending on soil type between six inches to a foot deep and then direct the downspout(s) into it. Create a six- to nine-foot dry creek bed, lined with pond liner, sloping down, away from the house. It's always important to get water away from building foundations. The garden can be any size necessary, although most of ours are about 6' x 8' across. The water

should drain away within 24 to 48 hours, to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

Plants for Rain Gardens

Some of the amazing plants that are perfect for rain gardens include Blue Flag Iris, Sneezeweed, Marsh Marigold, and certain ferns. Design for texture and interest all season long and it will be a stand-out feature in the garden. One can even have winter interest from the Sparkleberry and sedge grasses!

An evaporation pond is a bit more traditional, as it's just a regular, ornamental pond into which the downspout drains. You can even create a bog to receive the water before it drains into this pond. The bog will clean the water before releasing it into the pond. The pond holds the rainfall, evaporating away about an inch per day.

Our CNE garden also featured permeable pavers which have engineered gaps to allow water to flow through and into the ground. They look just like standard cast interlocking pavers. A good

permeable patio can add 12 per cent to the value of your home!

In place of our regular cast stone retaining wall, this year we used an incredible new product called Envirolok bags. They are engineered landscape fabric bags that get filled with soil. The bags get stacked and then planted with various types of plant material. At the CNE we used SedumMaster woven mats planted up with different types of Stonecrop. It was quite beautiful and attention grabbing!

Overall, it was quite heartening to see how the garden was received and the visitors' interest generated by the garden and educational signage. Just 15 years ago, no one would have even thought about initiatives like this and now it's really catching hold! It all makes us feel warm 'n' fuzzy about what we do.

Follow **Sean James** on Twitter @seanfernridge or by searching Fern Ridge Landscaping on Facebook. Check out the new mobile-friendly Fern Ridge Website at www.fernridgelandscaping.com.