

Church Rain Gardens for Creation Stewardship

One way to think of rain is as a reminder of our baptism. (This can be hard in the dark, wet winters of Western Oregon). God uses the common things of the world to communicate profound truths. Water is a key biblical image of God's grace, salvation and abundance. The quality and quantity of water are increasingly under threat. As people of faith, it is important to consider how we can care for God's waters of life. Urban areas are especially significant sources of water pollution. About 70% of all pollutants in our streams and rivers enter through storm water runoff according to government studies.

Congregations in urbanized areas have an opportunity to make a visible witness to stewardship by installing a rain garden. Rain gardens (a.k.a. vegetated infiltration basin) are planted basins that slow and retain water. They are a valuable way to cleanse and filter urban runoff, reduce flooding, provide wildlife habitat and beautify the urban environment. They also save money by reducing the demand on storm water systems or by helping avoid the need to expand such systems. In some municipalities, such as the City of Portland, you can get discounts on your sewage bills by installing rain gardens or other stormwater management approaches including bioswales, rain barrels, porous pavers and porous pavement.

St. Andrews in Portland has been a pioneer in good water stewardship by making its parking lot watershed friendly through the use of bioswales. Recently, Kenilworth Presbyterian in Portland incorporated ecological storm management water features into a new labyrinth.

Some good web sites for learning more about rain gardens include: Learn more about rain gardens at these locations:

<http://www.raingardens.org/>

<http://blog.americanrivers.org/wordpress/index.php/category/rain-gardens/>

<http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=127474>

To find out what plants to use in your rain garden in the Willamette Valley, go to

<http://www.cleanwaterservices.org/EducationAndOutreach/NativePlantFinder/default.asp>. For information on rain gardens and xeriscaping in Central and Eastern Oregon, check the appendices of the Central Oregon Stormwater Management Manual at <http://www.coic.org/stormwater/index.htm>

Most local governments have programs to help residences, businesses and non-profits reduce stormwater runoff. Call your local government to see what they offer. Many landscape architecture firms can help you design a rain garden or other stormwater management features.

A Statewide Opportunity to Restore Creation – Making Stormwater a Resource

In Oregon and throughout the nation, cities have been engineered to keep stormwater out of view and out of mind. This has turned the gift of water into a waste product. In December 2007, Oregon Environmental Council's Stormwater Solutions Team released *Stormwater Solutions: Turning Oregon's Rain Back into a Resource*, an important report and to turning this situation around to benefit our quality of life, the environment and city budgets. To download a copy of the guide, go to <http://www.oeconline.org/rivers>

One the report's priority actions is to “*Install green stormwater facilities at schools, parks, hospitals and other visible properties.*” The guide says “Such facilities would provide an excellent educational opportunity. Green stormwater facilities on public and commercial properties should include signage explaining what they are and why they're there, their benefits and how to maintain them. Repeating the message over and over raises awareness.” Many churches in Cascades Presbytery would be idea places to provide this educational opportunity!

In the City of Portland, grants of up to \$10,000 are offered for stormwater management projects of all types and sizes. The applications for 2008 are due on April 8 and may be downloaded at

<http://www.portlandonline.com/shared/cfm/image.cfm?id=127474>

The City of Portland also offers a Stormwater Retrofit Workshop throughout the year to help you learn how to qualify for Clean River Discounts on your sewer bill. The class will cover assessing your site, identifying suitable facilities, getting the necessary permits, and installing and maintaining facilities. For a calender, go

to <http://www.portlandonline.com/bes/index.cfm?&c=42458&cal=DisplayCalendar>. Clark County offers resources for gardening to benefit water and wildlife at http://www.naturallybeautifulbackyards.org/natural_solutions.php

If you could like help with moving a stormwater management project ahead at your congregation, please contact the Eco-Justice Team at jehrestore@aol.com or aney@coho.net.

Learn more about the effort to create a green infrastructure in urban areas.

<http://blog.americanrivers.org/wordpress/index.php/2007/04/30/green-infrastructure-a-bridge-made-of-pickles/>

What the Presbyterian Church Says about Water Quality

“The credibility of the church depends on practicing what it preaches. With respect to water quality, this means at minimum that it takes steps to ensure that its wastes do not contribute to further degradation.” *From Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice, A Report Adopted by the 202nd General Assembly (1990) page 47.*

Restoring Creation recommends a three-pronged strategy—education, regulation and economic incentives—to combat environmental pollution.

From Report and Recommendations on Limited Water Resources and Takings, Approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004).

Psalm 104 lavishly praises God for the earth’s abundant resources. Water is very much in the Psalmist’s mind:

You make springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills,

Giving drink to every wild animal; the wild asses quench their thirst.

By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation; they sing among the branches.

From your lofty abode you water the mountains;

The earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work. (Ps. 104:10-13, NRSV)

No Longer! What was once abundant is now scarce in many locations in the U.S. and even in the hills and valleys of the psalmist’s experience. And while the springs still gush forth and the clouds still water mountains, the human demand for fresh water has drastically reduced the flow between the hills. Fresh water is now in limited supply, and water quality and critical habitat are degraded. Water managers are finding it difficult to allocate the available supply equitably among those who need it and to keep rives and streams clean enough to allow species that depend on them to thrive.” Page 11.

“To care is to practice restraint. Humans should be frugal and share resources with plants and animals because they count in the eyes of God. All of creation is good and deserves ethical consideration.” Page 22.

Study Resources

Video: *Cherishing God’s Creation*, A video produced by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program. Part three of five focuses on water. Available at the Cascades Media Resource Center.

A Plan for Study in Action in *Report and Recommendations on Limited Water Resources and Takings, Approved by the 216th General Assembly (2004)*

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