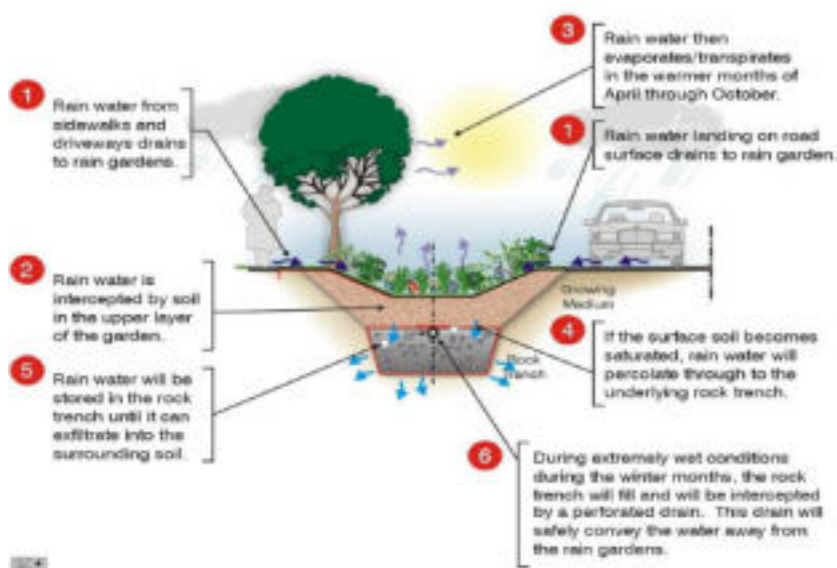
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Municipalities touting rain garden option to developers



By [Judie Steeves - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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More and more in municipalities around B.C., developers are being told they must keep runoff from their development on-site, and rain gardens are one way that can be achieved.

While designs for such features would vary from the "wet" coast to the dry interior of B.C., the concept is basically the same.

And, not only do they capture rainwater and allow it to soak into the ground instead of running off the site and into stormwater drains, then the nearest natural watercourse or lake—they are also more attractive than asphalt or concrete.

Instead of paving over soil and building expensive infrastructure underground such as piping, catch basins, separators and filtration systems, the thinking now amongst professional engineers and planners is a return to nature.

Rain gardens were just one of the topics discussed at a two-day conference held in Kelowna last week called From Rain to Resource: managing stormwater in a changing climate, which drew more than 100 civic politicians, staff and consultants from around B.C.

They attended workshops on such topics as rainwater management, site planning, urban watershed protection and restoration, risk management in rural hydrology and managing stormwater on steep slopes.

There were also philosophical discussions about responsibility and expectations.

The upshot of that was that people's attitudes must change, particularly with the likelihood of more severe storm events due to climate change in the coming years.

Instead of expecting the municipality to accept runoff from private properties, property-owners need to consider ways of keeping rainwater on their own land, and permitting it to gradually soak into their land, or retaining it in storage to use when the weather is drier.

Rain gardens were mentioned again, for use on private land, as well as on public land, such as in parking lots and medians along roadways.

Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd, in officially opening the conference, said people in Kelowna are beginning to see changes in public landscapes with more use of native plants which don't need so much irrigation.

She also pointed to the new UnH2O garden, a demonstration xeriscape garden in front of the H2O Centre, built by the Okanagan Xeriscape Association, and suggested that delegates visit it if they have a chance.

The conference was organized by the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the B.C. Water and Waste Association.

OBWB chairman Stu Wells, who is also mayor of Osoyoos, noted that his city is the last place in Canada where water passes through on its way to the Columbia River system in the U.S.

So, it's particularly important that those upstream in the Okanagan Valley treat that water with care, he said.

John Slater, the parliamentary secretary for Water Supply and Allocation, told delegates it's important that we design with nature in stormwater management.

As a former Osoyoos mayor he noted that city used to catch its stormwater and run it into

lakes and rivers, but now it has a bylaw requiring that all rainwater is contained on-site.

Innovation is important, he said.

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