

## Rain, rain, go away Lathrup Village

**Street floods prevented by gardens that soak up, filter storm water**

**BY MELANIE D. SCOTT**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

*November 19, 2006*

For years, Mary Kearney was used to water lingering for a day or two after a heavy rain. A grassy area between the sidewalk in front of her Lathrup Village home and the street was wet most days.

That changed in 2003, after Kearney and her family installed a mixture of compost and soil as well as a variety of plants to create a rain garden.

The purpose of the rain garden was to help with storm water runoff, which caused problems.

"Before our rain garden, that area was wet all the time," Kearney said. "In the winter, it would freeze over, and our driveway was like an ice rink. We had a massive drainage problem, and the rain garden took care of it."

In 2002, the City of Lathrup Village and members of the Southeastern Oakland County Water Authority (SOCWA) worked together to create a small rain garden at City Hall. Since then, residents throughout the city have been adding rain gardens to get rid of excess storm water and to beautify their property.

According to SOCWA, a rain garden is a depression in the landscape designed and planted to trap storm water runoff. With a mix of soil consisting of 60% compost, 30% sand and 10% topsoil, as well as a variety of native plants, the rain garden also filters the storm water by removing sediments and pollutants before the water reaches the nearby Rouge River.

"It has worked out really well here," said Jeff Mueller, city administrator for Lathrup Village. "I think the best thing about the rain gardens is that they cleanse the impurities from the water."



Scott Ringler, manager of Lathrup Village's rain garden project, discusses how the plants behind him on Avilla Boulevard help stem flooding on city roads and sidewalks and in ditches. The plants, such as joe-pye weed, buttonbush and swamp milkweed, trap and filter water. (WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press)

Mueller said there are about 21 rain gardens in Lathrup Village.

In addition to working with SOCWA, the city also works with engineer Scott Ringler, project manager of the city's rain garden project and an associate with Giffels-Webster Engineers in Rochester Hills.

"Residents have to maintain them, which basically means cutting down the plants in the fall and adding plants and mulch in the spring," Ringler said.

In the summer of 2005, Ringler and city residents created rain gardens on Avilla and San Rosa boulevards.

"The plants were donated by SOCWA and came from some Rouge River grants," Ringler said.

Native plants, already growing naturally in Michigan's wild areas, can be low-maintenance additions when established in rain gardens.

"Many of the citizens have agreed to try them out," said Lillian Dean, coordinator for the Healthy Lawn and Gardens program for SOCWA.

Kearney is one of the residents using native plants.

"We went for a natural look," Kearney said. "It's been a grand experiment because some plants flourish, and some don't like it at all."

Lathrup Village is the first community in Oakland County to promote rain gardens citywide, Dean said.

"They are very much leaders and stewards for cleaning storm water," Ringler said. "They took a problem and found a practical solution."

*For more information on installing a rain garden in Lathrup Village, call Jeff Mueller at 248-557-2600, ext. 225. Contact **MELANIE D. SCOTT** at 248-351-3681 or [mdscott@freepress.com](mailto:mdscott@freepress.com).*

**Copyright © 2006 Detroit Free Press Inc.**