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Learn How to Build a Rain Garden; Registrations Open for Nov. 10 Rain Garden Academy

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If you are interested in building a rain garden but aren't sure how to go about it, then you will want to attend a Rain Garden Academy hosted by the Illinois River Watershed Partnership and Beaver Water District from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 10, at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, 4703 N. Crossover Road, in Fayetteville. Becky Roark, IRWP Rain Garden Resource Specialist, said the Academy will offer valuable resource materials including a Low Impact Development Manual, a bus tour of area rain gardens, and lunch. The cost is \$25 per person and \$15 for students. The class will be limited to 50 people and pre-registration is required. Participants may register on line at www.irwp.org. Individuals affiliated with public and quasi-public institutions that are interested in applying for a Northwest Arkansas Rain Garden Project Mini-Grant are encouraged to attend.

“On July 1, the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission (ANRC) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded two grants totaling \$350,000 to build rain gardens to improve water quality,” said Dr. Delia Haak, Executive Director of the IRWP. “The IRWP received \$211,000 and Beaver Water District was awarded \$139,000. We have come together to administer the Northwest Arkansas Rain Garden Project to build 60 rain gardens in Northwest Arkansas over the next three years! Rain gardens will be located in the Illinois River Watershed and the West Fork-White River & Beaver Lake-White River Watershed.”

Dr. Haak added that some stream reaches in both of these watersheds are listed as impaired on what's known as the 303(d) list of the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). The Rain Garden Grant Project is designed to slow “non-point source” (NPS) urban and rural runoff and improve water quality in streams.

“Rain gardens help keep rain where it falls so that nature has a chance to filter pollutants from storm runoff that is headed to Beaver Lake, our drinking water source,” said Dr. Robert Morgan, Manager of

Environmental Quality for Beaver Water District. “The cleaner that water is when it reaches the lake, the less money it costs for the District to clean the water for drinking.”

Becky Roark added, “Building a rain garden is one of the easiest and most cost efficient ways to manage wet weather and reduce storm water pollution. A rain garden absorbs runoff more efficiently than a standard lawn, sometimes as much as 30 to 40 percent more. Capturing rainwater in a rain garden, holding the water for a short time, and then slowly releasing it into the soil can reduce the rush of a large storm quickly, neatly and naturally. Rain gardens lessen the impact of impervious surfaces and polluted runoff because they are low-tech, inexpensive, sustainable, and esthetically beautiful. I hope that people will attend, take the information home, and take action to help us improve our watersheds through rain gardens.”

The workshop is designed for homeowners, commercial developers, gardeners, nursery owners, and personnel who work for city, state, and county government, parks departments, landscapers, and anyone who wants to know more about rain gardens or connect with others who want to build and maintain rain gardens in the area. Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for landscape architects and Sustainable Design Learning Units (SD/LUs) for architects are available. Program sponsors include Illinois River Watershed Partnership, Beaver Water District, Walmart, American Electric Power Foundation, EcoPotential, and Botanical Garden of the Ozarks.

The Illinois River Watershed Partnership is a diverse group of men and women who work to improve the water quality of the Illinois River. Visit irwp.org. Beaver Water District supplies drinking water to more than 300,000 people and industries in Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, Bentonville and surrounding areas. Visit bwdh2o.org.