

Catch the rain

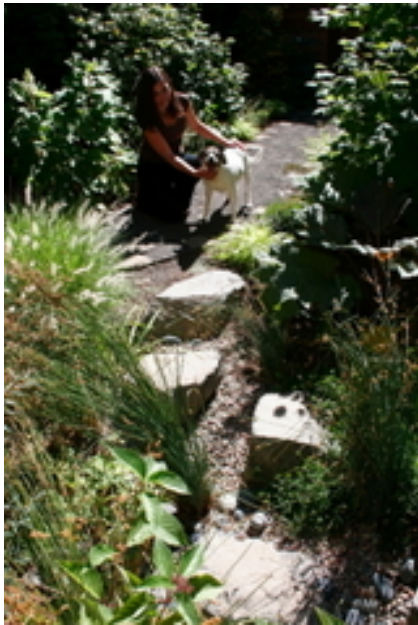
Posted by [Sunset](#), February 3, 2009 in Sustainable gardening

By [Jim McCausland](#), [Sunset Magazine](#)

As a garden designer who specializes in capturing rainfall, Kristien Forness decided it was time to refine the idea of the rain garden. “People are turned off with bioswales,” she told me, “because they usually look overgrown. That’s why they’re usually put at the back of the garden.



decided to bring it forward in the landscape, and to make it interactive by leading you over it on stepping stones that are surrounded by water when it rains.” She put these ideas to work in her own rainfall garden, pictured here just a year after it was installed.



When it's not raining, this part of the garden is just a low area between a sideyard path and a rear patio. You cross it on stepping stones surrounded by sedges and edged with a river birch, *Pennisetum orientale*, and a collection of perennials such as hostas, Japanese forest grass, red ornamental rhubarb, May apple, and Russian sage.

When it is raining, a downspout routes roof runoff into this low area, where it collects and percolates into the ground. If a particularly vigorous cloudburst should fill this infiltration basin, the overflow is channeled into a nearby dry well.

Installations like this one are particularly valuable because they help recharge ground water and keep rainfall out of the city's stormwater system, whose interconnection with the sewage system can wreak havoc during heavy rains.

It's also nice that this garden looks so good, but then that's what Forness does. "My niche," she says, "is to make beautiful outdoor rooms that are sustainable."

Forness owns [Fusion Landscape Design](#) in Portland, Oregon.