

# SINGING IN THE RAIN:

## EMBRACING THE HYBRID METHOD FOR RAIN GARDEN EDUCATION

M. MAHER,<sup>1</sup> S. LUNT,<sup>2</sup> S. PORZELT,<sup>3</sup> D. PHINNEY,<sup>4</sup> A. SCARONI,<sup>5</sup> C. SAWYER,<sup>6</sup> J. PIKE,<sup>7</sup> S. WAICKOWSKI,<sup>8</sup> A. WARNER,<sup>9</sup> R. GREENE<sup>10</sup>

Clemson Extension, Clemson University: Pickens County<sup>1</sup>, Pickens County<sup>2</sup>, Charleston County<sup>3</sup>, Dorchester County<sup>4</sup>, Georgetown County<sup>5</sup>, Pickens County<sup>6</sup>, Pickens County<sup>7</sup>, Georgetown County<sup>8</sup>; mallord@clemson.edu<sup>1</sup>, slunt@clemson.edu<sup>2</sup>, sporzel@clemson.edu<sup>3</sup>, dphinne@clemson.edu<sup>4</sup>, ascaron@clemson.edu<sup>5</sup>, calvins@clemson.edu<sup>6</sup>, pike@clemson.edu<sup>7</sup>, swaicko@clemson.edu<sup>8</sup>; CU Online Team, Clemson University: Pickens County<sup>9</sup>, Pickens County<sup>10</sup>, aware@clemson.edu<sup>9</sup>, rgreen7@clemson.edu<sup>10</sup>



**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**  
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

### PROGRAM GOAL:

Rain gardens are a working landscape feature that receive stormwater runoff from impervious areas to work with nature to collect, filter, and infiltrate stormwater runoff, which allows them to manage erosion & moisture control issues, aid in water conservation, beautify the landscape, remove pollutants, and attract desirable wildlife. To be inclusive and meet the needs of all individuals, beginner to advanced, residential to professional, varied educational methods such as online learning modules, websites, factsheets, discussion boards, in-person hands-on workshops, and informative signage are utilized by Clemson Extension to address different learning styles and accessibility.

### PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

Attract a diverse audience of individuals to utilize some or all of the online and in-person educational resources provided by Clemson Extension, in order for them to be able to enhance an area that will:

- Be designed with soil, site conditions, and plant selection optimized
- Manage erosion & moisture control issues improving its function
- Collect and infiltrate stormwater runoff, removing pollutants helping to protect water quality
- Aid in water conservation and use rainwater harvesting systems as appropriate
- Beautify the landscape for long term aesthetic interest
- Attract desirable wildlife with the use of native plants
- Have a maintenance and inspection plan

### PARTNERS:



Image 1: MRG Field Day instructors with rain garden

Image 2: Rain garden installed by 2023 Master Rain Gardener Participants

Image 3: MRG Participants installing a rain garden

### METHODS & ACTIVITIES:

#### 1. ONLINE PROGRAMS

Master Rain Gardener (MRG) program is a hybrid, multi-week curriculum allowing for self-paced online learning modules, hands-on field experience, and includes hands-on components that provide participants with the opportunity to apply practices learned. Online programming allows Clemson Extension to reach a larger audience who may not be able to participate in-person.

- Letter of Completion - Online Only
- Certification Track - Field Day & Online Course

#### 2. CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Conference presentations allow for a diversity of audiences to hear about rain gardens and the value they can provide in a landscape.

- 2023 South Carolina Master Gardener Conference
  - Rain Gardens as Wildlife Habitat Workshop
  - Introduced Master Gardeners and homeowners to the concept of rain gardens
  - Recruited this audience to the MRG Course
- 2023 Golf Industry Conference
  - Introduced Rain Gardens to nationwide Golf Course Superintendents

#### 3. IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS

Traditional Extension Programs involves face-to-face instruction from Extension Professionals.

- Master Rain Gardener Field Days
  - Participants install a rain garden from start to finish utilizing the skills they learned from the online course
  - Utilize Community Partners for workshop locations
- Rain Garden Maintenance Workshops
  - Continuing education opportunities for previous MRG participants

#### 4. ONLINE RESOURCES

Several factsheets and videos about rain gardens were created and housed on Clemson Extension's Home & Garden Information Center Website and the Clemson Extension Water Resources Rain Garden Website. These serve as a free resource for the general public.

#### 5. SIGNAGE

Educational signage was installed at every public rain garden that was constructed as a result of the MRG Program

### IMPACT:

**358** People have completed the Master Rain Gardener Hybrid Program since 2018

**125** People have participated in conference workshops in 2023

**127** People have attend in-person workshops and field days since 2018

**3X** The amount of people were able to participate in rain garden education due to the hybrid/online format



Image 4: MRG Participants with their recently installed rain garden

Image 5: MRG Participant with their sketch of their rain garden. MRG Participants learned the basics of garden design from a landscape architect

Image 6: Clemson Extension educational rain garden signage at a rain garden that was installed in 2022

### EVALUATION:

Qualtrics post surveys were given to participants at the 2023 Master Gardener Conference, MRG Online Course, and MRG Field Day

After completing the Online Course...

- 100% of participants plan on implementing practices learned from the course in the future
- 100% of participants felt the online course was a valuable use of their time
- 95% of participants enjoyed the hybrid course format

After attending the Field Day...

- 100% participants agreed or strongly agreed that the Field Day provided them with hands on experience that will help them with future rain garden installations

After attending a conference workshop...

- 100% of participants indicated that they would consider installing a rain garden at their homes

### FUTURE OUTLOOK:

Rain gardens can be incorporated into a variety of environments. In the future we hope to:

- Update Online Course and incorporate new modules based on survey results
- Offer refresher courses and workshops for previous MRG participants
- Write additional factsheets

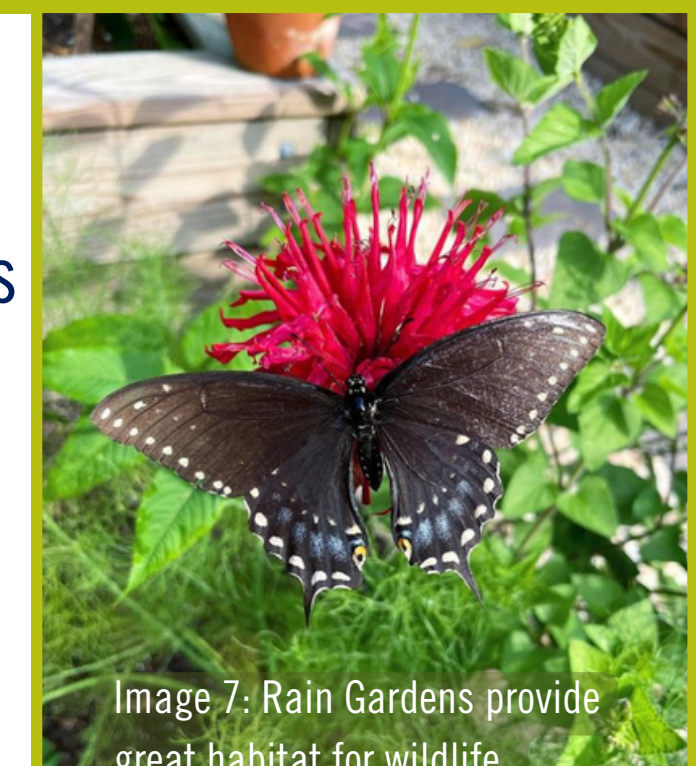


Image 7: Rain Gardens provide great habitat for wildlife