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Grant Awarded to Promote Rain Gardens in Franklin and Delaware Counties

The Ohio EPA has awarded \$47,056 to Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District to assist garden centers and nurseries promote rain gardens to their customers. During the two-year grant period, Franklin Soil and Water will provide workshops to garden center staff on rain garden installation and maintenance, plant selection, and the influence of stormwater runoff on local rivers and streams. Displays with rain garden brochures will be provided to the garden centers along with plant tags identifying plants suitable for use in rain gardens. Written and Web-based resources will help sustain the program beyond the grant period to encourage long-term stewardship.

Several garden centers are already onboard with the "Gardening for Clean Water" grant program, including Acorn Farms, Mill Creek Growers, Oakland Nurseries, Scioto Gardens Nursery and Straders Garden Centers. Mary Stowe, Nursery Manager, at Oakland Nurseries on Oakland Park Avenue said that she is "so excited that Franklin Soil and Water Conservation [District] received the grant funding. This funding allows for a timely opportunity to educate those individuals—landscape architects, designers, landscaping teams, horticulturalists - who directly impact our local environment and the people living in our neighborhoods and communities each and every day. This represents one step forward in protecting and managing one of life's most precious resources."

A rain garden is an attractive depressed area designed to allow rainwater to soak naturally into the ground with the help of deep-rooted plants. They are used to lessen the amount of stormwater that is carried—untreated—through storm sewer systems to local rivers and streams. When areas become developed, the amount of rainwater that is intercepted by trees, soaks into the ground and percolates into aquifers decreases substantially. Instead, when rainwater meets hard surfaces including roofs, roads and parking lots, it is quickly piped to waterways where streambanks are eroded and flooding may occur. The pollutants picked up by stormwater runoff, such as car fluids, landscaping chemicals, and pathogens from animal waste also contribute to decreases in water quality. Rain gardens can help offset the impacts of these water quality issues by acting as a filter in the landscape to trap and treat polluted stormwater on-site.

"To simply say more people are 'Going Green' these days is an understatement. All across Franklin County, more of our neighborhoods and communities are prioritizing the careful

stewardship of our natural resources," said Franklin County Commissioner President Paula Brooks, who is a founding member of the Central Ohio Rain Garden Initiative. She is a fan of rain gardens and has been supportive of Franklin Soil and Water's efforts. "This grant to promote more rain gardens in Central Ohio is part of a partnership between the state, the county, and our team at Franklin Soil and Water. These are the types of investments that can directly benefit our residents, protect our environment, and build upon the jobs and green economy growing in Franklin County."

Franklin Soil and Water has been on the leading edge of using rain gardens as a best management practice for stormwater management in central Ohio. They were the moving force behind the first public rain garden in Franklin County at the ODNR Division of Wildlife District 1 office in 2006. There are now 242 rain known rain gardens in Franklin County and Franklin Soil and Water has helped in just over half of these projects. These rain gardens infiltrate 50,000,000 gallons of rainwater each year.

A previous Ohio EPA grant allowed Franklin Soil and Water to partner with the City of Westerville, the Ohio State University and residents of the Brook Run neighborhood on a rain garden project that is unique in Ohio. The Brook Run project installed 16 residential and five right-of-way rain gardens and monitored before and after outflows of rainwater runoff. Data from fall 2010 through spring 2012 show a reduction in stormwater from the neighborhood of 82% to 95%. The Brook Run project has been presented at national conferences and Franklin Soil and Water has received requests for information on it from across the country.

The Ohio Environmental Education Fund is administered by Ohio EPA. Grants up to \$50,000 are funded from one-half of the civil penalties collected by the Agency for air and water pollution control violations. Eligible grant recipients include environmental groups, public and private schools, colleges and universities, trade or professional organizations, businesses and state and local governments. Approximately \$1 million is given each year.

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Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District is the natural resource agency in Franklin County with the sole purpose of promoting conservation and responsible land use for better water quality and natural resource management. This is accomplished through establishing partnerships and providing technical guidance and targeted environmental education.