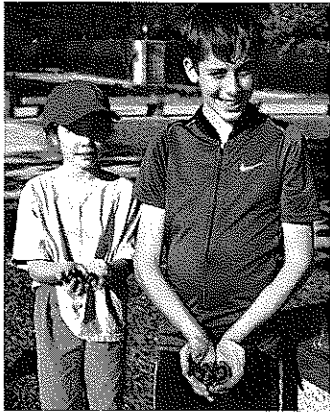


# Growing Native Has Grown!

by Jim McGlone, Urban Forest Conservationist, Virginia Department of Forestry

When growing native wildflowers it is said first they sleep, then they creep, then they leap. This refers to their habit of spending the first few years growing roots before they grow shoots. The Growing Native program has followed this pattern of growth as well.

Growing Native is a signature program of the Potomac Watershed Partnership ([www.potomacwatershed.net/](http://www.potomacwatershed.net/)) and is managed by the Potomac Conservancy ([www.potomac.org/site/](http://www.potomac.org/site/)). The main



purpose of Growing Native is to engage volunteer effort to collect tree seeds for state nurseries and others to grow into new trees—trees that will improve and protect water quality in the Potomac and Chesapeake Bay.

Growing Native started in 2001 and collected about 26,000 pounds of seed in the first two years throughout the Potomac River watershed. By 2006, the collection had almost doubled—to 23,000 pounds per year.

In Fairfax County, seed collection during the first few years was in the hundreds of pounds. In 2006, volunteers collected 1,000 pounds of seed; the program, like wildflowers, was beginning to creep. In 2007, seed collection leaped to over 5,000 pounds, which will translate into nearly 400,000 trees.

Originally, all seeds collected by the Growing Native program were transferred to the Virginia and Maryland State nurseries, but in recent years schools and other cooperators have received seed to grow and plant locally.

Growing Native is a fun group conservation project, and now is the time to start planning for your participation next year. Go to the program web site ([www.growingnative.org](http://www.growingnative.org)) to find out which species' seeds are being collected, and start scouting for seed trees. Growing Native requires that each collection bag contains only one type of seed,

so the best seed trees grow in the open by themselves where the seeds won't get mixed. If you don't own the tree, you will have to get permission from the owner to collect the seed even on public land. Do not collect in National Parks or natural areas.

Be careful about the bags you use to store your seed. Tree seeds have water in them and they sweat. If they are sealed in plastic bags, the seeds will get wet and mold and be ruined. Even plastic grocery bags can ruin seeds. Growing Native provides bags at its drop-off stations, but sometimes you must improvise. The best bags are the open weave bags that onions and potatoes come in or burlap. If you plan on using your own bags, start saving them now so you'll have plenty when you start collecting seeds.

For more information about Growing Native, the value of trees in the environment or ideas for service projects, visit [www.growingnative.org](http://www.growingnative.org) or contact your local Department of Forestry office. In Fairfax and Arlington, call Jim McGlone at 703-324-1489, TTY 711.



Volunteers show off their collected tree seeds at a Growing Native drop-off kiosk.

# Conservation Currents

Northern Virginia Soil & Water Conservation District  
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## Research Reveals Problems and Potential of Rain Gardens

*by Dan Schwartz, Soil Scientist*

Rain gardens are becoming a popular method of stormwater management both for their relative ease of installation and their environmental appeal as a low impact development practice. Yet little is known about the long-term functioning of rain gardens: several years after construction, do the rain gardens we've built filter the volume of stormwater for which they were designed? Are they able to cleanse that water to the anticipated degree?

The Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District attempted to answer these questions by surveying twenty Fairfax County rain gardens. Now completed, this research shows that while many older rain gardens function well, the functionality of others is degraded due to poor design, poor maintenance, poor initial construction or a combination of some or all of these factors.

Stormwater best management practices (BMPs) are highly engineered facilities that are a legal requirement of new development. They treat the additional runoff created by new impervious surfaces such as roofs and parking lots. The rain gardens involved in this study are all stormwater BMPs.

Each BMP rain garden is designed to filter a specific volume of runoff. This volume is calculated based on the size and land use of the rain garden's drainage area. Each facility goes through the county permitting process before being built to ensure that it will properly filter the new runoff volume for which it has been designed. BMP rain gardens should not be confused with the simple rain gardens that

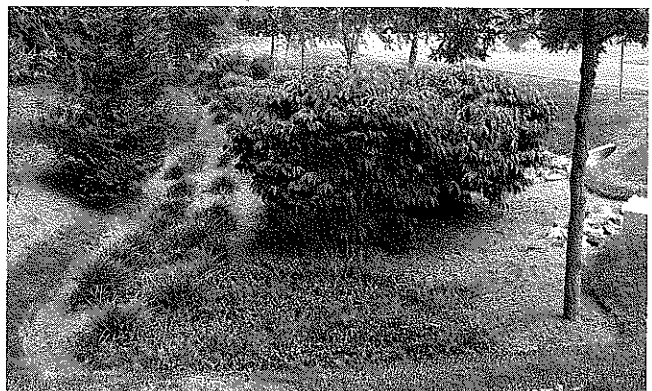
homeowners can design and install themselves on their own property. Homeowner rain gardens are relatively easy to construct and depending on their size or location may not need to be permitted.

### How rain gardens work

All rain gardens work on the theory that infiltrating runoff through soil will filter out pollutants as well as lead to groundwater recharge.

From the surface down, BMP rain gardens consist of a thin layer of hardwood mulch, a thick layer of engineered soil, and a layer of gravel. Either the rain garden surface is depressed below the surrounding ground or an earthen berm is built around the rain garden to create an area where water can pool. This surface is planted with species that can tolerate

**Rain Gardens continued on page 4**



*Rain gardens can provide water quality benefits when they are well-designed, properly built and maintained.*