

Episode Three: Catch the Rain

In this episode, Meg West visits several gardens on commercial and residential properties in Santa Barbara County. What makes these sites so special? Each property features a unique rain garden! Rain gardens promote water conservation and water quality through a variety of techniques that mimic natural water processes. Meg explains the different features of rain gardens, how to implement them, and why they are beneficial.



The first site Meg visits is a residential home with a large lawn. At this property Barbara Wishingrad, program manager of the green living co-op, is hosting a hands-on workshop to teach community members how to design and implement their own rain garden. Volunteers remove the lawn and dig basins to slow, spread, and sink runoff from the roof and driveway. When rain falls it will now be directed into the garden, instead of running into the street. With the help of Barbara's volunteers this project was completed in a day.

The second site Meg visits is a residential property that incorporates a variety of water wise techniques. The many elements of this garden include edible plants, rain chains, native plants, and bioswales. This home also features a rain collection system which directs runoff from the roof into rain gutters, through a filter, and into a rain barrel. Once the rain barrel is full, the water travels through an underground system and emerges to feed vegetation in other parts of the yard. Meg talks with the home owners and landscape designer to explain the many benefits of this efficient and beautiful rain garden.



The third site is a commercial property where all the parking lot runoff used to go straight into the stormdrain. The site was redesigned to allow runoff from the parking lot to flow into a narrow strip of landscaping. This was done using curbcuts and bioswales. The purpose of rain gardens is not to change the natural drainage pattern of a site, but to give the water a place to go. In this case, water can now flow through curbcuts and into the landscaping.

Site number four is an ocean friendly garden. This term, coined by the Surfrider Foundation, was developed to remind people of the connection between stormwater runoff and ocean pollution. When it rains, water runs over hardscape, down sewer drains, and into the ocean. As it flows over sidewalks and streets water picks up chemicals that pollute the oceans. Keeping stormwater in your garden, instead of letting it run down the street helps protect the ocean from pollution.



This episode ends with the segment What Tree is That. Jeff Nighman, owner of Santa Barbara Natives Nursey talks about the Hollyleaf Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*). This tree is extremely versatile; it can stand very little water, or a lot- thus it is perfect for a rain garden. It does well in both shade and sun. It can also be hedged as a screen or grown as a tree. A couple more benefits include bearing edible fruits, and resistance to disease.