

RAIN GARDENS

Use—don't lose—the water that falls on your paved areas and roof.

■ Here are two plot plans, one for sun and one for shade, from “Catch the Rain” in the 2009 *All-Seasons Garden Guide*. To purchase this issue, go to <http://Shop.Almanac.com>

A rain garden is a shallow, bowl-shape area that captures runoff water during a heavy rain and allows it to soak into the ground gradually. Both of these plans are designed for a 12x24-foot space but are adaptable to smaller areas.



by Robin Sweetser

A Rain Garden for Sun

Plants set into a rain garden that gets full sun must be able to endure both occasional flooding and dry spells.

(See the plant diagram on page 2.)

In the center, plant . . .

1 Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia* ‘Ruby Spice’), a woody shrub that bears fragrant, pink, bottlebrush flowers in the summer. 5 to 6 feet tall; Zones 4 to 9. One plant.

2 Red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), which has white blossoms in spring and reddish-purple leaves in the fall—although its most attractive features are its red stems, which lend winter interest to the landscape. 6 to 10 feet tall; Zones 2 to 8. One plant.

3 Blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*), which brightens the rain garden with lavender-blue flowers in the spring. It looks very natural in a wet setting. Avoid the yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), which is an invasive species that will take over. 2 to 4 feet tall; Zones 3 to 9. Four plants.

4 Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*), which has purple flowers in late summer that butterflies can’t resist. 3 to 5 feet tall; Zones 3 to 7. Two plants.



1

—Song Sparrow Perennials



2

—Gary A. Monroe @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database



3

—Jennifer Anderson @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

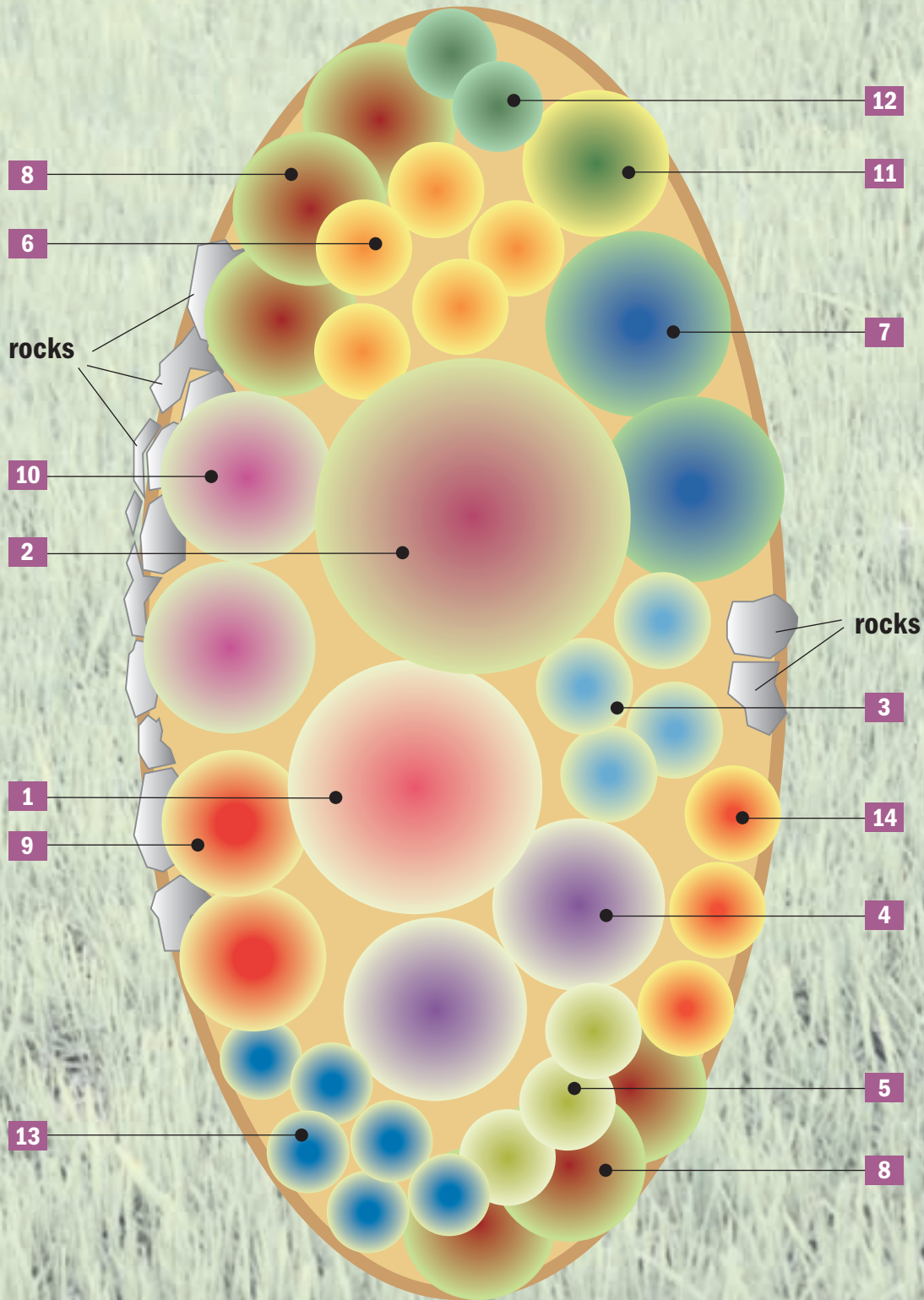


4

(text continues on page 3)

A Rain Garden for Sun *(continued)*

12x24 feet



A Rain Garden for Sun *(continued)*

(See the plant diagram on page 2.)



5

www.WaydeGardens.com

5 Astilbes (*Astilbe*), which are long-lived, moisture-loving perennials that will thrive in the sunny rain garden if planted where they get some afternoon shade from taller shrubs nearby. They bloom in summer and are available in pinks, reds, purple, and white. 1 to 3 feet tall; Zones 3 to 8. Three plants.



6

—Oasee Daylilies

6 Daylilies (*Heemerocallis*), which may not be natives but can keep your rain garden in bloom over a long season if you plant early, midseason, and late varieties. Assorted heights and a rainbow of colors are available. Zones 4 to 11. Five plants.

For the drier outer edge . . .



7

7 Blueberries (*Vaccinium*), whether highbush (up to 5 feet tall) or lowbush (up to 2 feet tall) varieties, which add both a flowering shrub and an edible fruit to your landscape. Zones 3 to 8. Two plants.



8

8 American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), which is a pretty, ground-covering shrub that also bears edible fruit. About 6 inches tall; Zones 2 to 7. Six plants.

9 Bee balm (*Monarda*), which in summer features brilliant-red, pink, or white flowers that attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Look for a mildew-resistant variety. 3 feet tall and wide; Zones 3 to 9. Two plants.



9

www.bluestoneperennials.com

10 New England aster (*Aster novae-angliae*), which will carry the show into fall with its bright, violet-purple flowers. It gets quite tall but can be cut back to half its height in June to create a shorter and bushier plant, if desired. Up to 6 feet tall; Zones 4 to 8. Two plants.

11 Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*), which bears sunny yellow flowers in late summer. It is highly adaptable to wet or dry soil. 3 to 5 feet tall; Zones 4 to 8. One plant.

12 Meadow anemone (*Anemone canadensis*), which is deer-resistant and salt-tolerant. This tough little perennial bears pure-white blossoms in late spring. 2 feet tall; Zones 2 to 9. Two plants.

13 Blue cardinal flower (*Lobelia siphilitica*), which has spikes of true blue flowers in late summer. 2 to 4 feet tall; Zones 5 to 9. Six plants.

14 Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), which features orange blossoms that provide excellent nectar for butterflies. In addition, the plants are an important larval food for monarch butterflies. 2 to 3 feet tall; Zones 4 to 9. Three plants.



10



11

—Jennifer Anderson/USDA



12



13

—Jennifer Anderson/USDA



14

—W. Alice Burpee & Co.

A Rain Garden for Shade

Placing a rain garden in full shade is not recommended; partial shade is best.

(See the plant diagram on page 5.)

In the center, plant . . .

1 Rhododendrons, especially cold-hardy native rhodora (*Rhododendron canadense*), which like damp soil and partial sun. They will bloom profusely in the spring. 2 to 4 feet tall and wide; Zones 3 to 6. Two plants.

2 Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), which needs one male plant to act as a pollinator, along with the females, if you want a crop of colorful red berries. For this garden size, choose from dwarf cultivars. 3 to 5 feet tall; Zones 3 to 9. Two plants.

3 Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), which grows well in sun or partial shade. It has rich red flowers in late summer. 2 to 3 feet tall; Zones 3 to 9. Six plants.

4 Pink turtlehead (*Chelone lyonii*), which is a trouble-free perennial that doesn't mind wet feet. It blooms in the late summer to early fall. 2 to 4 feet tall; Zones 3 to 8. Seven plants.

5 Purple meadow rue (*Thalictrum dasycarpum*), which loves a damp spot in partial shade. It can get quite tall and has clouds of purple-tinged white blossoms in summer. 3 to 6 feet tall; Zones 5 to 9. Two plants.

6 Wild columbines (*Aquilegia canadensis*), which are an important source of nectar for hummingbirds and butterflies and thus will draw them to your rain garden. They produce their bicolor red and yellow blossoms in late spring. 1 to 3 feet tall; Zones 3 to 8. Five plants.

For the drier outer edge . . .

7 Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), which is a nicely rounded shrub with glossy leaves and dark blue berries. It has creamy-white blossoms in late spring and colorful fall foliage. 6 to 10 feet tall and wide; Zones 3 to 8. One plant.

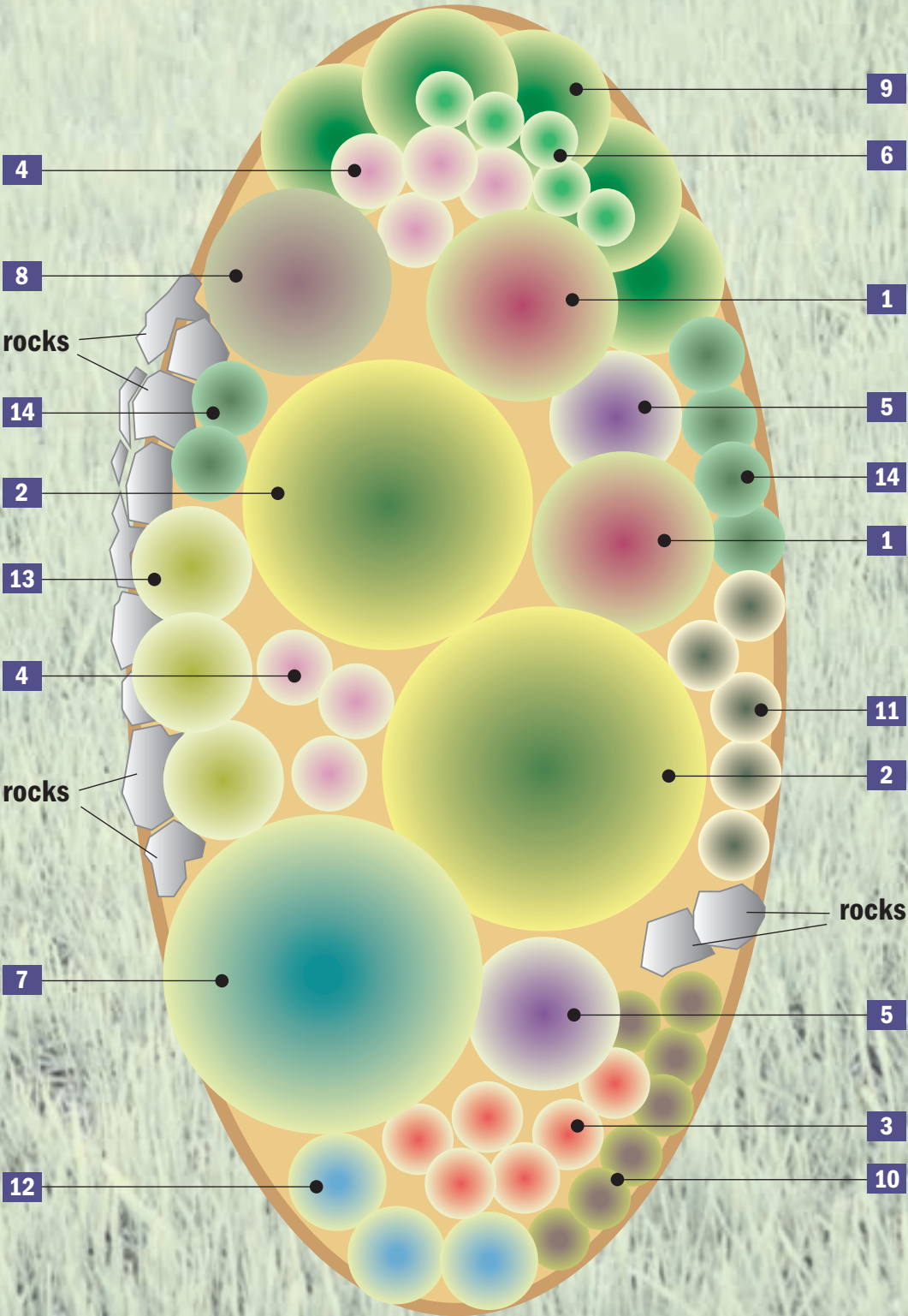
8 Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*), which has fragrant white flowers that appear before the plant leafs out in the spring. The foliage becomes a neat, crimson mound in the fall. 3 feet tall and wide; Zones 5 to 9. One plant.



(text continues on page 6)

A Rain Garden for Shade *(continued)*

12x24 feet



A Rain Garden for Shade *(continued)*

(See the plant diagram on page 5.)



—Bruce Vanderveen

9 Common bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), which is a rugged evergreen ground cover in the heath family. It has white flowers in spring and red berries in late summer. 3 to 8 inches tall, spreading to between 2 and 4 feet wide; Zones 2 to 6. Five plants.

10 Coral bells (*Heuchera sanguinea*), which are colorful foliage plants that send up tall spikes of tiny red, pink, or white flowers in late spring. 6 to 12 inches high and wide; Zones 3 to 8. Seven plants.



—J. S. Petersen@USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

11 Foam flower (*Tiarella cordifolia*), which is a deer-resistant plant with white flowers in spring. (*Heuchera* and *Tiarella* have been crossed to create a hybrid genus called *Heucherella* which combines the gorgeous foliage of heucheras with the showy flowers of tiarellas—look for this one!) 5 to 12 inches tall; Zones 3 to 7. Five plants.

12 Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*), which is a low-growing, spreading perennial with clusters of light-blue flowers. 8 to 12 inches tall; Zones 3 to 8. Three plants.



—Tom Barnes/University of Kentucky

13 Zigzag goldenrod (*Solidago flexicaulis*), which bears golden yellow flowers in the fall. 2 feet tall and wide; Zones 3 to 8. Three plants.

14 Spotted geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), which has dainty, pinkish-purple flowers that bloom above the mound of lobed leaves in the spring and often again in the fall. 1 to 2 feet tall; Zones 4 to 8. Six plants.



—Betsy Ann Rosenblatt



—Robert H. Mohlenbrock/USDA



—Jennifer Anderson/USDA

Robin Sweetser, a frequent contributor to the *All-Seasons Garden Guide*, has developed a rain garden to catch the water that runs off her porch roof.