

# Best Practices

## Kansas City 10,000 Rain Gardens Draw Citizens into Regional Fight Against Water Pollution

An eco-friendly stormwater management initiative launched by Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes and other regional leaders in November 2005 is being heralded in the February issue of House & Garden magazine as "the most ambitious horticultural project in the United States."

"10,000 Rain Gardens" is an effort by the city to encourage citizens to minimize stormwater runoff and improve water quality by capturing and filtering rain water in rain gardens, which are shallow depressions planted with native prairie plants, as well as rain banks (barrels) that save rain for later use, and roof gardens that catch rain that otherwise would become runoff. Kansas City is plagued by the same sewer and stormwater problems as many other cities having older systems, and faces the same staggering rebuilding costs in its efforts to comply with Environmental Protection Agency regulations. The city has set out to mitigate the problems to the extent possible by mobilizing the entire community in a voluntary effort to attack a major water pollution problem at its source.

The five-year goal of 10,000 Rain Gardens is, literally, 10,000 rain gardens in back yards and on any other public and private property. Hallmark Cards, Inc., for example, plans to install a 1,000-square-foot rain garden at

its corporate headquarters in Kansas City. Barnes is installing two rain gardens at city hall, in addition to one at her home. And rain gardens are appearing on school grounds throughout the metro area.

Leaders of the initiative are aware that other cities are installing rain gardens, but are not aware of others that have set so high of a rain garden goal. But given the size of the population and the number of homes, parks, and other green spaces in the region, they believe that their five-year target is attainable.



**Kansas City (MO) Mayor Kay Barnes assisted in the groundbreaking of the first corporate rain garden in front of Black & Veatch last year as part of the 10,000 Rain Gardens.**

At the heart of the 10,000 Rain Gardens initiative is a Web site - [www.rainkc.com](http://www.rainkc.com) - that is a single source of public information on why rain gardens are needed, how easily they can be created, and where to find helpful resources. The site provides a how-to brochure, links to gardening professionals, sources of plants and other useful items, a schedule of workshops and other presentations on rain gardens, a link to a speakers bureau, a blog on rain gardens, and an e-newsletter - Rain Garden Report.

The Web site also provides information on the genesis of the initiative - how, in 2004 and 2005, consultants for the Kansas City Water Service Department interviewed stakeholders - neighborhood activists, elected officials, economic development officials, government employees, developers, educators, corporate citizens, and civic leaders - to get their views on stormwater runoff and sewage overflow problems, and how this produced a consensus on the need for a regional approach to the problems, more green solutions to flooding and runoff problems, and a public education plan aimed at engaging citizens in the solutions.

The idea of creating 10,000 rain gardens came out of a Stormwater Coordinating Committee meeting held in May 2005. Barnes requested the development of a comprehensive plan for the initiative and, six months later, the mayor was joined by Jackson County Executive Kathryn Shields and Johnson County Commission Chair Annabeth Surbaugh in a regional rally for the formal metro-wide launch of 10,000 Rain Gardens.

Accompanying the launch were television and radio commercials and print ads urging citizens, corporations, and non-profit organizations to join the local governments in tackling the stormwater and overflow problems in the regional watershed, and seminars and displays on the initiative at home and garden shows. The media campaign produced interviews with rain garden experts on television and radio stations, and feature stories and editorials in newspapers. A survey of residents following the six-week kick-off campaign found that 43 percent of citizens correctly identified stormwater as the number one source of non-point source pollution of area streams and rivers. It also found that, using the results of a survey conducted six months earlier as a baseline, the campaign had produced a double-digit increase in awareness of the problem. More than four out of five of the 4,700 citizens surveyed said they were willing to use native plants in their landscaping in an effort to improve water quality.

Training for professionals has been



**Kansas City (MO) Mayor Kay Barnes**

another successful component of the initiative. Three full-day sessions (\$50 per participant) sold out and became standing-room-only events for 200 landscapers, municipal employees, retailers, and others. Jackson County conducted public workshops and Master Gardeners groups were given training materials and a grant from the Mid-America Regional Council to conduct training throughout the spring and summer of 2006. One professional workshop attracted more than 90 developers, architects, engineers, and municipal government representatives.

"Ten Thousand Rain Gardens is an idea whose time has come," Barnes wrote in a February 20, 2006 column in the Kansas City Star. "Research released last week in scientific journals says that rain gardens capture and clean up to 99 percent of pollutants found in urban runoff. This helps keep dangerous pollutants out of our stream...When we each do our part, we contribute to cleaner water and a healthier community."

Information on 10,000 Rain Gardens may be requested on the Web site's "Contact Us" page or at 816-616-4236.



Mayors are invited to submit the "Best Practices" of their cities to U.S. MAYOR. Contact Public Affairs at 202-293-7330 or send eMail to [info@usmayors.org](mailto:info@usmayors.org)



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