

Forum: Learn from 2012 drought and prepare for future

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Illinois has finally emerged from the drought that had such a terrible impact on our crops and yards last summer. Fortunately, climatologists are predicting that this spring will bring normal precipitation. But what will this summer be like?

Instead of regarding 2012 as unusual, we should evaluate the drought's impacts and take steps now to conserve water. Fortunately, there are many simple and low cost things homeowners and businesses can do.

In the summer, we spend over 30 percent of our water bill on landscaping. This is not surprising given that lawn grass and annual flowers tend to have shallow root systems, which make them prone to drying out. Native plants are a good alternative because they have deeper roots that are able to tap into groundwater many inches or feet below the surface.

Rain gardens are another good water conservation tool we could use more of. Last year, the city of Peoria got a grant from Illinois American Water to install a demonstration rain garden near the intersection of MacArthur Highway and Richard Allen Drive. Rain gardens soak up stormwater and filter it into the ground. By recharging our local groundwater, we can be better fortified ourselves against drought while simultaneously giving a break to our overtaxed sewer system.

If you want to learn more about rain gardens, Prairie Rivers Network will be giving a free workshop on May 4 at 10 a.m. at the Peoria Public Library's Downtown branch.

Rudy Habben

Peoria Heights

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