

### Collecting Rain and Spreading Hope

On the grounds of Lane Agripark, one will find a garden strategically located next to the main drive and adjacent to a large parking area. Visitors pass by it each day and some pause to take note of the wonderful floral display that it presents to passersby. Few however, know that this is a rain garden, and even less understand its function. According to experts at the University of Tennessee, they define a rain garden as one that is planted in a depression whose primary purpose



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is to catch runoff from impervious surfaces designed at catching excess water and allowing it to infiltrate into the ground. Furthermore, these experts explain that they can serve to help mitigate the impact of erosion and runoff of pollutants into local watersheds. They stress the importance of using plants that are adapted to both wet and dry soil conditions and recommend using native perennials that are found naturally growing near streams and floodplains.

A mouthful no doubt, but this is precisely why the rain garden at Lane Agripark was installed. Due to the large parking area and tremendous amount of water that was being funneled into the pre-existing drainage culvert, erosion and water pollution became a concern. Thus, the decision was made to install a rain garden to help alleviate these problems. The project began in early 2014 and was a collaborative effort between UT Extension and the Master Gardener Associations from both Rutherford and Wilson Counties. With the help of Dr. Andrea Ludwig, Associate Professor from the Biosystems and Engineering Department at UT Knoxville, the garden was designed and engineered to help maximize its water catching ability. A wide range of native herbaceous and woody plants were installed and, in late spring of 2014, the initial garden was complete.

Fast forward to today, the garden is thriving under the diligent care of dedicated Rutherford County Master Gardener volunteers. Two of these folks are Andra Prewett and Gail Tate. Both have contributed countless hours tending and maintaining the garden. Now in its seventh year of existence, the garden has aged like a fine wine and is a true exhibition of both art and science. Prewett, who is the current rain garden project leader, has a passion for conservation and the use of native plants. She states that, "Tennessee has some of the most beautiful natural flora and unfortunately, more if it is disappearing every day, and it's hard not to feel ecological grief. Once I realized that gardening can be a conservation activity, I've felt a sense of hope." This is reflected in her efforts to introduce numerous

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As with all projects at Lane Agripark, the rain garden's mission is two-fold, serving to function practically and as an educational tool that fulfills the mission of both UT Extension and the Tennessee Extension Master Gardener program. The rain garden has succeeded in this goal and has done it so effectively, that it can now claim to be an award-winning project. Earlier this year, the Rutherford County Soil and Water Conservation District nominated the garden for an award. As a result, the Master Gardeners of Rutherford County received the well-earned Conservation Promotion Award in Category II from the Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts for their work on the rain garden project. This award not only validates the success of the garden both as a functional tool for water runoff and pollution control, but also as an outreach instrument helping to educate the public.

I encourage you to come by and see this award-winning project for yourself. Take a moment and enjoy its functional beauty and the important ecological role that it plays in the urban landscape. If you stop by on Tuesday or Friday mornings during the Rutherford County Farmer's Market hours, you may even see Andra Prewett or Gail Tate lovingly tending the garden, nestled amongst the many flowers that it hosts. Both are eager to share their passion and knowledge with appreciative visitors. If you would like to learn more about rain gardens, please go to [uthort.com](http://uthort.com) and see the publications listed under the 'stewardship' tab. Here you will find helpful information about rain garden construction, engineering, placement, and plant selection recommendations. You can also follow the rain garden on Instagram at the handle [raingardenrutherfordco](https://www.instagram.com/raingardenrutherfordco) to see pictures and to learn more about the project.

For questions or comments, please feel free to reach me at the UT/TSU Rutherford County Extension office. Our main office line is 615-898-7710 and my email is [jski@utk.edu](mailto:jski@utk.edu). Additionally, please check us out on the web at [rutherford.tennessee.edu](http://rutherford.tennessee.edu) to learn more about upcoming classes and all other Extension programming activities that we offer.



**Gail Tate(left) and Andra Prewett, holding the Conservation Promotion Award in the rain garden located on the grounds at Lane Agripark. Photo J. Stefanski**



**The rain garden located on the grounds at Lane Agripark. Photo J. Stefanski**