



A BOG FOR THE BACKYARD

THE RAIN GARDEN'S LESSER-KNOWN COUSIN CAN ABSORB RUNOFF AND SUPPORT BIODIVERSITY.

BY THERESA SULLIVAN BARGER

ABOVE

Kyle Turoczi, a co-owner of Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery & Landscapes, constructs a bog garden in Prospect, Connecticut. Boulders hold down the liner and provide a perch for wildlife.

Lisa Turoczi's residential client wanted a water feature in their backyard to attract birds but didn't want to deal with an electrical pump. Turoczi—a landscape designer and co-owner of Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery & Landscapes in Woodbury, Connecticut, with her wetlands ecologist husband—suggested a bog garden because it would offer a safe water source for wildlife without the need for a pump or filters. “It’s more of a wildlife feature. It’s creating

an ecosystem that not a lot of people know about,” Turoczi says. The client, she adds, was “blown away by it. They saw so much wildlife coming to the spot.”

Bogs, which take hundreds or thousands of years to form in nature, are freshwater wetlands of soft, spongy ground. They differ from marshes and swamps in that they’re highly acidic and have low oxygen levels, and from rain gardens in that they’re

always wet. The acidic soils provide a good habitat for plants such as blueberries, cranberries, and azaleas, and are also ideal settings for carnivorous plants.

When Turoczi installs a bog garden, her firm digs a hole a few feet deep, lays down a liner, crisscrosses branches across the bottom to provide perches for wildlife, and then adds peat moss. Boulders surround the pond for aesthetics and to hold



ABOVE
Native orchids, called grasspinks, and carnivorous pitcher plants thrive in the moist soil of a residential bog garden in southeastern Pennsylvania.

down the liner, followed by wood chips. She places water-loving plants at the water's edges so that they stay wet, and other native perennials and grasses farther out.

While bog gardens are still rare in residential settings, professionals who have designed and built these gardens tout a long list of reasons to install them. They satisfy the growing interest in native plants to help birds,

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butterflies, and bees while providing a diverse habitat. They provide an attractive solution to a wet area and can be educational and fun because of the frequent inclusion of carnivorous plants. "My kids love to look inside and see the different insects," says the horticulturist Peter Zale, the associate director of conservation, plant breeding, and collections at Longwood Gardens. Zale created two bog gardens at his home in southeastern Pennsylvania. "You're bringing diversity into your garden," he says.

Underwood & Associates, a landscape design and ecological restoration firm in Annapolis, Maryland, installs bog gardens as part of living shorelines to address nutrient pollution and coastal erosion for waterfront properties, says the firm's principal and CEO Keith Underwood, whose license plate reads "BOG-MAN." Bogs help "stabilize the shoreline and mimic the native materials and native plants" and also cleanse water "better than any other resource," Underwood says. As Chris

Becraft, a partner at Underwood & Associates, explains, an engineered solution such as a rain garden works well to collect rainwater in a smaller event but can't absorb increasingly intense and long rainfall, whereas during prolonged downpours, a bog's water surface barely changes.

"I would argue that bogs were the original rain gardens," says the landscape horticulturist Bob Brzuszek, the owner of the Artful Gardener in Starkville, Mississippi, and a professor emeritus of landscape architecture at Mississippi State University. Bog gardens also offer visual interest year-round, including in the winter months, if designers use the right grasses, Brzuszek adds. "There's a wealth of flowering species that could really become exciting from March through October," he says.

As for care, Turoczi advises removing fallen leaves in the spring, but otherwise, bogs are largely maintenance-free. Just like in nature, she says, "they take care of themselves." ●