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# EXTENSION

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Grant funds will allow for the completion of the Red Oak Rain Garden in Urbana.

## Red Oak Rain Garden nears completion with award of grants

URBANA, Ill. – The Red Oak Rain Garden natural area was recently awarded two grants by the [Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation](#) which will allow for the completion of the final phase of the garden’s renovation.

The [Red Oak Rain Garden](#) is a 10,000-square foot demonstration site on the Champaign-Urbana campus. The garden reduces sidewalk flooding, provides wildlife habitat, and educates people about sustainable landscape design.

“These grants allow us to improve the garden for both human and wildlife visitors,” says [Eliana Brown](#), a water quality specialist with [Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant](#) and [Illinois Extension](#), who serves as director of the rain garden’s team. “We plan on building a bridge and adding new early-blooming native plants to signal the beginning of spring and provide welcome nourishment for birds and pollinators returning after winter.”

The original garden was built in partnership with Facilities & Services in 2007. In 2019, the [Student Sustainability Committee](#) and other donors joined as partners in the rebuild. This helped the team to design and build a three-phase garden renovation, which includes 9,000 plants and a sustainably harvested wooden bridge.

The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the phase three bridge construction in spring 2020, and volunteer Champaign County Master Gardeners and East Central Illinois Master Naturalists were limited in the work they could do with COVID precautions.

But Brown notes there were some silver linings as well, with the rain garden serving as a much-needed outdoor classroom this fall and enhancing campus academic experiences during the pandemic.

“Several horticulture and landscape architecture classes, joined by Extension volunteers, helped the fall installation of plants covered by the grant, and we’ve learned that the Child Development Lab has brought children to see the garden as part of their outdoor learning,” Brown says. “We hope all of these students and volunteers continue visiting the garden for years to come.”

Through a three-to-one program that matched up to \$7,000 of donations, and an additional \$6,000 for volunteer hours, the Community Stewardship Challenge Grant promotes support from local donors and volunteers. The garden team partnered with the [Champaign County Design and Conservation Foundation](#) to complete the requirements for this grant, which also includes Dorner Drive Retention Pond and Illini Woods natural areas. The corresponding \$5,000 Public Amenities and Events Grant will be used for improvements that enhance visitor use and enjoyment and allow for lecture events to be held at the garden.

Funds from both grants will go toward plant installation, volunteer tools, the bridge, descriptive signs, and future events that increase community involvement.

The Red Oak Rain Garden was added between Allen Hall and McKinley Health Center to fix flooding issues that affected the nearby sidewalks and threatened a large red oak tree. The garden’s ground cover of native plants acts as a small-scale wetland, absorbing and filtering rainwater runoff, which mitigates flooding and improves water quality. The garden is certified as a [Monarch Watch](#) butterfly waystation and as bird-friendly by the [National Audubon Society](#).

To stay up to date, follow Red Oak Rain Garden on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or [Instagram](#).

**SOURCE:** [Eliana Brown](#), Water Quality Specialist, [Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant](#) and [Illinois Extension](#)  
**WRITER:** [Emily Steele](#), Media Communication Coordinator, Illinois Extension

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