

Connecticut

AND THE REGION

NOTICED

Let It Rain (but Only Into My Garden, Please)

By CAROLYN BATTISTA

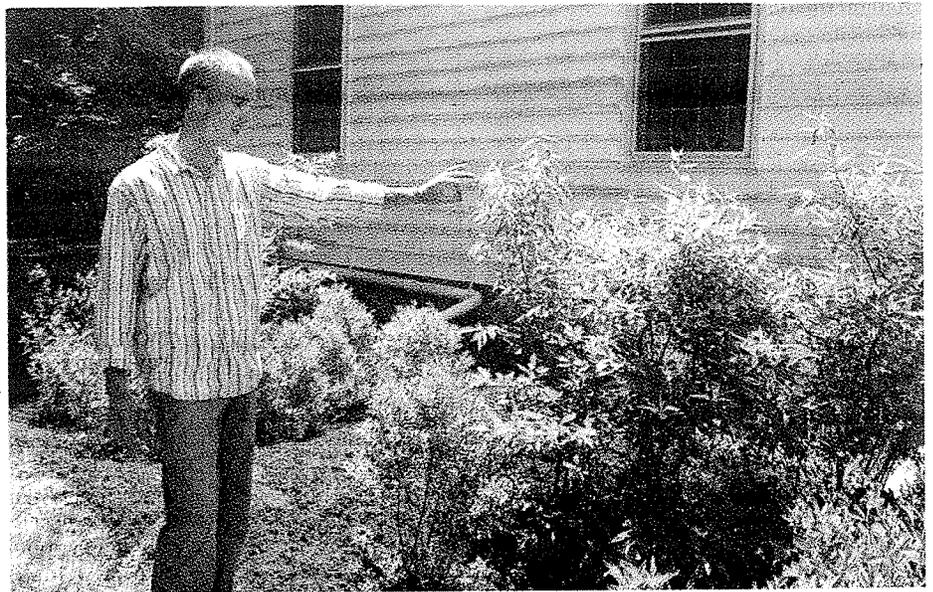
HADDAM

MICHAEL DIETZ has been spreading the word. Rain gardens — shallow, plant-filled depressions, carefully placed — do more than just look good. By collecting rain that runs off impervious surfaces, like roofs, driveways and parking lots, they capture pollutants that would otherwise go into storm-water systems and on into waterways like Long Island Sound.

“Rain gardens are a great way to reduce impacts on our water resources,” said Dr. Dietz, a storm-water specialist who created the demonstration rain garden behind the the University of Connecticut’s Cooperative Extension System building in Haddam and who co-wrote the Extension’s booklet “Rain Gardens in Connecticut: A Design Guide for Homeowners.”

The 12-page booklet (available free by calling (860) 486-3336, or online at nemo.uconn.edu/tools/publications.htm) advises readers on topics like determining garden size (based on amount of roof runoff) and selecting suitable plants (ones that tolerate both very wet and very dry conditions). It stresses that a properly designed rain garden does not hold storm water long enough for mosquitoes to breed in it.

Dr. Dietz, 35, was a graduate student in UConn’s Department of Natural Resources Management and Engineering when he became interested in the work of Maryland scientists who saw rain gardens as a way to reduce pollutants in Chesapeake Bay. For his doctoral thesis,



C.M. Glover for The New York Times

TRAPPING RUNOFF Michael Dietz by the rain garden at a UConn building in Haddam.

he installed the 220-square-foot rain garden in Haddam in 2002 and began monitoring it.

“This is it — this was my research site,” he said, stepping around the garden’s inkberry bushes and black-eyed susans. Measuring “what went into the garden and what overflowed” for two years, he found that the garden captured 99 percent of the runoff from the Extension building’s roof.

“We’ve taken hundreds of people here to see

how it’s done,” he said, adding that rain gardens around Connecticut include those throughout the parking lot of the Evergreen Walk shopping center in South Windsor, those dotting the UConn campus in Storrs, and the new demonstration one at the Extension building in Norwich.

There is also one at his house in Windham, where he lives with his wife, Sandra, and daughter, Anna. “I thought I should practice what I preach,” he said.