

# Your voice can make a difference for your watershed

People are more likely to listen to their friends, family, and neighbors than to anyone else. The messenger can be just as important as the message. People also change their behavior in response to social norms. In other words, people are more likely to take small actions for stormwater issues if they see the people around them taking these actions and if they hear that others support these actions.

Richard Hurd

## What should I know about stormwater in our watershed?



Urban development has increased the amount of stormwater flowing through the Lake Wingra watershed after each rainstorm. Today, 30% of our watershed is impervious to water, meaning there is less natural land area to soak up the rain.



Stormwater runoff can pollute wildlife and fish habitat, affect our ability to swim and play in Lake Wingra, and lead to flooding that causes costly property damage to our neighbors and local businesses.



During a 1-inch rainstorm, a home with a 1,000 sq. ft. roof will produce over 600 gallons of stormwater runoff! If this water can't soak into the ground around the home, it enters the storm sewer system and washes downstream, carrying debris and pollutants with it.



The simplest way to protect our watershed is to capture the water where it falls. All property owners play an important role by taking steps to soak up the rain and snowmelt that runs off our roofs, pavement, and lawns before it enters the street.



We can work together to reduce flooding and property damage in our neighborhoods, improve the wildlife habitat in and around our community's lakes and wetlands, and protect our watershed so we can enjoy swimming, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, and wildlife-viewing in Lake Wingra for generations.



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# What simple actions can I promote to support water infiltration?



*Help us meet our goal of 25% rain barrel participation in the Lake Wingra watershed.*

## 1. Capture roof runoff

- Redirect roof downspouts into a green space so the water can soak into the soil instead of washing out into the street
- Install a rain barrel



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## 2. Improve your lawn's ability to soak up water

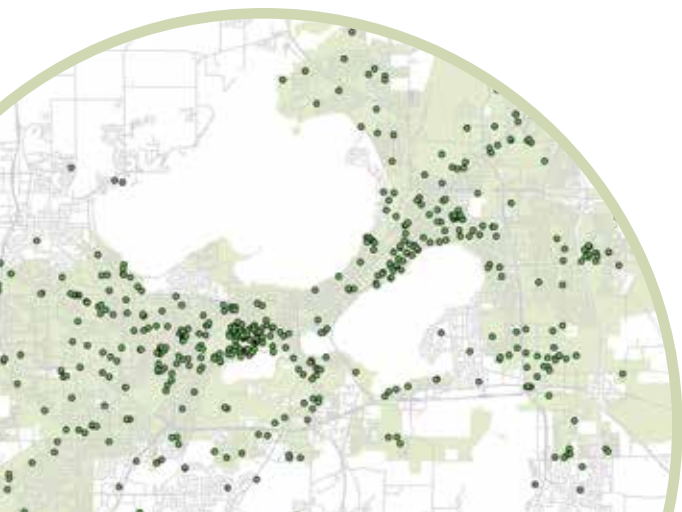
- Mow high (2.5 inches or more)
- Aerate compacted soils and apply compost to improve the soil and grow a thicker, healthier lawn to soak up more rain

## 3. Plant native plants

- Start small by converting a small area of turf or pavement into a strategically placed native garden—native plants have deep roots that soak up more water
- Learn how to build a rain garden or terrace garden to capture runoff from your roof, yard, or driveway before it hits the street

## 4. Clean up the water that does run off your property into the street

- Get smart about fertilizer—use only if the soil needs it, and choose slow-release, phosphorous-free fertilizers
- Keep leaves out of the street gutter in the fall and use excess leaves as mulch or compost in your yard



Join the Madison community goal to reach  
**1,000 new rain gardens!**  
Over 600 rain gardens have been planted so far.

[cityofmadison.com/engineering/  
stormwater/raingardens/1000raingardens.cfm](http://cityofmadison.com/engineering/stormwater/raingardens/1000raingardens.cfm)





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## How do I start the conversation?

### Start with likely adopters.

It's not worth your time to engage people who just don't care. So, start by identifying individuals who are most likely and able to take action. They can begin to model these actions in the community and establish new social norms around stormwater.

### Consider who is the right messenger.

We tend to listen to people who are most like us and who we like and trust. If this isn't you, then who will your neighbors be most likely to listen to?

### Communicate at the right time and place, when it's relevant.

No need to knock on your neighbor's door on a Sunday morning to talk about stormwater. Talk to people when they are already tending their yard or when they are at the park where there is visible flooding. Or start a conversation on social media sites such as Nextdoor or a neighborhood Facebook group around a relevant event, like before a predicted rainstorm or on the opening day of the Friends of the Arboretum's annual plant sale.

### Build trust over time.

It may take multiple conversations (known as "touches" in the marketing world) to motivate a friend, neighbor, or business owner to get started. Be patient, ask for small commitments, and celebrate small steps in the right direction.

### Speak with a positive tone.

When responding to concerns, avoid refuting or negating them. Instead frame your responses in the positive. For example, instead of saying "No, rain barrels are not difficult to install," say "Rain barrels are pretty easy to install, and I have a friend who can come over and help, if you're interested."

### Make a simple, achievable ask.

The process of installing a rain garden requires many small actions. Some people aren't ready to dive in, and it may make sense to help them take just the first step by providing them with a quick and easy online how-to guide about installing a rain garden. [ripple-effects.com/raingardens](http://ripple-effects.com/raingardens)

### Listen to and understand their barriers to action.

A key part of motivating action is making the benefits outweigh the barriers. Listen carefully to understand your target audience's main barrier(s) to your ask so you can focus your communication on easy steps that address their specific barriers. "Well, if you're interested but just don't know how to do it, I heard there's a demo happening in June at the park. I know a few people planning to go with their kids."

### Sometimes, people just need prompts.

People are more likely to follow through on an action if they get a visible or audible reminder in the moment. For example, you could post the free Leaf-Free Streets yard sign next to your leaf pile in your front yard during the fall to remind neighbors to move their leaves out of the street, too. [ripple-effects.com/Leaf-free-Streets](http://ripple-effects.com/Leaf-free-Streets)

# What are common barriers to action I can help address?

## COMMON BARRIERS TO ACTION

“My action won’t make a difference, so what’s the point?”



This barrier is related to low “outcome-efficacy”—individuals believe their actions will not make a difference. For example, some residents argue that Lake Wingra’s stormwater problems are caused by the city or by businesses in the area, not by individual homeowners.

## HOW TO RESPOND

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### Increase their confidence that their action(s) will make a difference

- Confirm their concerns while relaying we all need to do our part to make a difference.
- Suggest a small easy step that will allow them to soak up rain on their own property.
- Highlight both personal and community benefits to taking action to see which message resonates with them. For example, directing water away from their house and foundation and into a rain garden or rain barrel will also relieve pressure on the city stormwater system, reducing the risk of flooding on their property and that of their neighbors downstream.
- Share opportunities to engage in green infrastructure projects, such as attending a public information meeting to learn about and provide comments on an upcoming street reconstruction or park plan.

## SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

*“An analysis of the Wingra watershed suggests that our collective action, as homeowners, can increase the amount of rainwater that soaks into the ground. One benefit of this will be restoring our wonderful natural springs that have been lost around Lake Wingra, which provide fresh water into the lake. Our watershed needs about 1 in 3 homes to redirect their downspouts to green space or a porous surface, or 1 in 5 homes to install a rain garden. Are you interested in finding a couple of other people to commit to redirecting our downspouts? It might help us all feel like we’re amplifying our impact—and we will be!”*

## “I don’t have the skills or know how to get started.”



This barrier is related to low “self-efficacy”—individuals may be interested and motivated but lack the confidence in their ability to do the work. This could be due to a lack of information, skills, or physical ability.

### HOW TO RESPOND

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## Increase their confidence in how to get started

- Suggest resources to help them learn how to, for example, install a rain barrel:
  - » If possible, refer them to a neighbor who has put in a rain barrel who can share how they got theirs set up.
  - » If they are a do-it-yourself type, direct them to a great YouTube video.
  - » If they are socially oriented or like group activities, suggest a friend who could help or point them to a local in-person demo workshop they could register to attend.
  - » If they want to talk to a friendly no-cost expert, they can also reach out to Friends of Lake Wingra for advice. [lakewingra.org/](http://lakewingra.org/)
- Encourage them to start with a small first step, like sending them a website link about rain barrels or inviting them to check out your own rain barrel the next time they walk by your house.
- If they are curious about rain gardens, encourage them to walk by one of the rain gardens.

### SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

*“I definitely understand the feeling of not knowing where to begin with something! Would you like me to provide some ideas to help get you started? For example, I heard there’s a demo happening in June at the park. I know a few people planning to go with their kids.”*

“I don’t have the time.”



Many people are busy raising a family or are busy in their career or working multiple jobs. Perhaps they are just having a busy few weeks and your timing is off.

HOW TO RESPOND

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## Respond with compassion and suggest some creative solutions that are low pressure

- If they are genuinely interested but just too busy, offer to connect them with a local high school student who is looking for summer work, or check back in with them later when school activities quiet down. You could even prompt with a few questions to see if they would prefer to hire a contractor (for a larger scale project) and offer to help them find a good one who has done other work in the neighborhood.
- Consider organizing a neighborhood workday by inviting interested residents on a block to work together to install a few rain gardens in people’s yards or street terraces. This may take the pressure off a single homeowner or resident who is interested but stretched for time.
- If they truly don’t have the time and might not want to pay the money to hire a contractor, another “ask” could be to help pass on the message to someone else they know or to reach out to their network or favorite business to advocate for them to do some type of green infrastructure project.

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

*“I completely understand—it sounds like your family and work are keeping you busy! I’ll reconnect in the fall when things quiet down for you—it’s a wonderful time to enjoy the outdoors and prep the soil for winter.”*

*“I was thinking of teaming up with a few people in the neighborhood for a rain garden planting day in June after school is out. We could get the kids outside and help each other out. There are a few sites along our street we’ve already picked out that could use a rain garden. Would you be interested in joining?”*

## “It costs too much money.”



For many people, stormwater infrastructure and actions feel like luxury or unnecessary expenses.

### HOW TO RESPOND

## Suggest free or low-cost changes they can make to still contribute

- Suggest simple actions like redirecting their roof downspouts or changing lawn mowing practices to mow high. These actions can improve water infiltration at no additional cost.
- If the city or a local nonprofit is providing free or discounted rain barrels, native plants, or other materials, provide this information while emphasizing any benefits that might align with their values (e.g., creating wildlife habitat, cleaning up the lakes that their kids swim in).
- A rain garden can be scaled up or down depending on the resources available. Suggest starting small with just a few plants in a small area and adding a little space and more plants each year to spread out the cost. Plant Dane sells rain garden plants for just \$2.25 each (half the regular retail cost).  
[ripple-effects.com/plantDane](http://ripple-effects.com/plantDane)
- If they are interested in doing a school or community rain garden project, Dane County also has a free native plant program for group projects.  
[lwr.d.countyofdane.com/grants-and-costshare/free-plants](http://lwr.d.countyofdane.com/grants-and-costshare/free-plants)

### SAMPLE TALKING POINTS

*“I know how much you love being out in nature, and even just adding a few native plants with deeper roots will soak up more rainwater and create some nice habitat for butterflies and pollinators. Plant Dane sells discounted rain garden plants for just \$2.25 each, so you could carve out a small area for \$20 or \$25 and start your garden this year!”*

*“One easy thing you could do that has a big impact is redirect your roof downspouts so water flows into the yard instead of onto the driveway and into the street. Just as an example, during a 1-inch rainstorm, a home with a 1,000 sq. ft. roof will produce over 600 gallons of water runoff, so this is a no- or low-cost action with a really big impact for reducing water runoff. This was something we did at our house this spring—we hadn’t ever thought of it before!”*





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