

ST. GEORGE'S PARISHIONER CREATES A RAIN GARDEN  
BY: LYNN PASKA

Rosemary Pannone, a parishioner at St. George's Episcopal Church, believes that gardening is an act of faith and stewardship. Which is why, when she isn't at her job as a nurse, she is expending her excess energies into developing a Rain Garden on the grounds of the church where she worships. While rain gardens are not as popular locally as in other parts of the country, St. George's is the only one publicly available for viewing.

"Our Rain Garden, on the north side of the church, is a hand-made depression in the ground that is used as a landscape tool. It improves water quality, collects water runoff from the roof, stores and filters it, and keeps it from running into our historical cemetery and further eroding our very old (circa 1800) stones as well as keeping it out of the public storm sewer," she explained. This area of the church grounds is difficult to improve as it receives little sun and too much water. "It was the perfect weed garden before I started this project," Rosemary joked.

Also in the midst of this setting was a Glastonbury thorn tree with a rich history that dates back to the 1700's. "Since I couldn't move the tree, I decided to improve the surroundings," she added.

Materials, plants and hard-scape were donated by parishioners and people in the community who heard about the project. Rosemary's son Mike Thiessen, long-time parishioner Barbara Wengrovius, and parish sexton Gerald Cooper, all worked tirelessly on this much-needed restoration this summer.

The south side of the church, in the same general vicinity, has the same – if not worse – problem. Rosemary and her crew of volunteer gardeners will do additional work on the property next year, including planting a few beds of perennials and, hopefully, a solar-powered water feature.

"Designing for beauty is easy for me," explained Rosemary, who is a Master Gardener with Cornell Cooperative Extension and has attended SUNY Cobleskill for Landscape Design. "But here I have to keep in mind that everything has to be nailed or cemented down to prevent vandalism." In keeping with the church's history, she has used many antique and heritage plants - like hollyhocks, phlox and bishop's weed – that are historically correct for the area and often much hardier than recent hybrids.

While the Rain Garden should be the crown jewel of the church campus by the end of summer 2009, Rosemary does not intend to have the project hibernate this winter. She is anticipating the start of a class – starting January 31<sup>st</sup> through mid-May for children 3-6 and 7-13 on Saturday morning - that she calls **SEEDLINGS (St. George's Environmental Education Developing Lifelong Interest In Gardening Studies.)** The goal will be to create lifelong interest in plants and gardening in a fun, educational way. Parents and adults will be welcome to join the class and should contact St. George's parish office for more details.