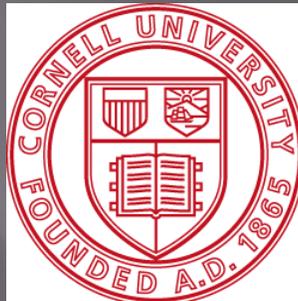


# RAIN GARDEN MAINTENANCE GUIDE

What you need to know to care for a  
rain garden



Albany County  
**Soil and Water  
Conservation District**



**Cornell University**  
Cooperative Extension  
Albany County

Quick review...

# Rain gardens help to manage storm water runoff



# What happens to the rain water?



Rain gardens capture storm water and pollutants allowing them to filter down to re-charge local aquifers



# ACSWCD and CCE Albany Co. partner with Albany County Storm water management to create demonstration rain gardens



# Planting a rain garden Bethlehem site



# Fine tuning plant location



# The Cohoes site needed a layer of gravel



# A Rain garden is planted

## Cohoes site





**Sue's Rules**  
for **Rain Gardens**

# Next steps...

- ▣ Bethlehem Rain Garden a few years after planting...



# Caring for a rain garden

- ▣ First season/ getting established
- ▣ One inch of water is needed per week – water around the base of the plants
- ▣ Weeding allows plants to get established without competition

# Long term watering

- ▣ By the second and third year the rain garden is more established
- ▣ Long periods of drought may require some watering
- ▣ Check mulch levels to ensure that there is 2-3 inches of shredded bark mulch to conserve moisture and control weeds

# Mulch

- ▣ Shredded hardwood bark mulch is ideal because it stays together as the garden fills with water and drains.
- ▣ It will break down and need to be replaced every few years.

## More on mulch

- As the plants grow and fill in, less mulch will be needed within the garden but it will remain very useful for edging and when plants are divided.
- The decomposition of the mulch over time adds nutrients



# Fertilizing and Compost

- ▣ Fertilizing is not necessary for a rain garden
- ▣ The addition of compost pre-planting is the basis for rain garden nutrition
- ▣ Compost can also be used as top dressing as a mulch

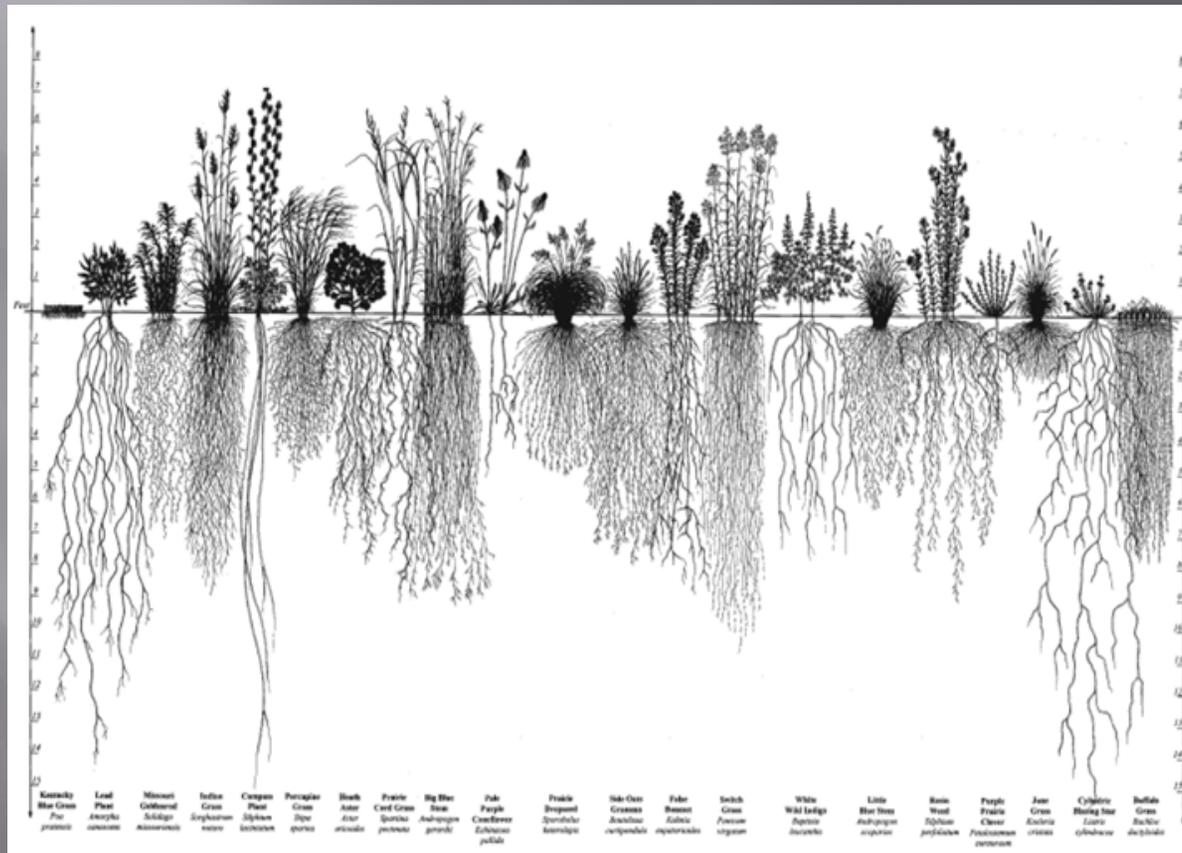
# Plant care in a rain garden

- ▣ Native plants make up the majority of plants in a rain garden
- ▣ Care is similar to any perennial garden but pinching and deadheading are not necessary
- ▣ Plants are **NOT** cut back in the fall but in the spring
- ▣ Divide plants in the spring

# Why Native plants?

- ▣ They have a relationship with the local ecosystem
- ▣ Natives can tolerate the dry to wet swings that the garden experiences
- ▣ They have extensive root systems that create the channels that direct the rain water down to the aquifer

# Root systems of native plants



# New England aster



# Eupatorium 'Joe pye weed'



# Eupatorium 'Boneset'



# Echinacea



# Sources for native plants

- ▣ Project Native in Great Barrington, Ma.  
[www.projectnative.org](http://www.projectnative.org)
- ▣ Fiddlehead Creek Farm and Nursery in Fort Ann, NY [www.fiddleheadcreek.com](http://www.fiddleheadcreek.com)
- ▣ Catskill Native Nursery in Kerhonkson, NY  
[www.catskillnativenursery.com](http://www.catskillnativenursery.com)

# Dividing plants

- Early Spring is the time...



# Tips to minimize disease

- ▣ Remove dead and diseased material promptly
- ▣ Keep weeds to a minimum
- ▣ Minimize plant stress especially in the first year of planting– water when necessary
- ▣ Water early in the day and avoid wetting the foliage

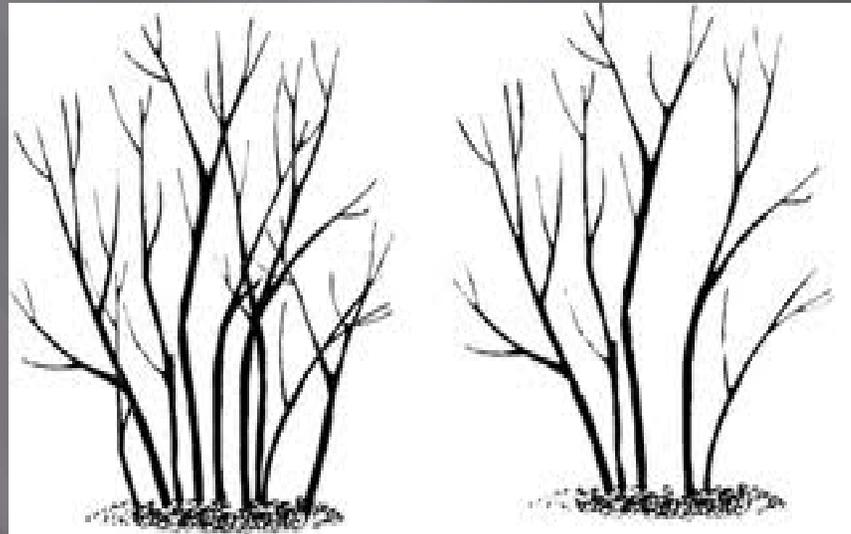
# Shrub care

- ▣ Care depends on specific needs of the shrub
- ▣ Plant should be chosen to accommodate garden size so minimal pruning will be needed, mostly to remove a dead or crossing branch
- ▣ **Maintain a natural shape and do not shear off the top**

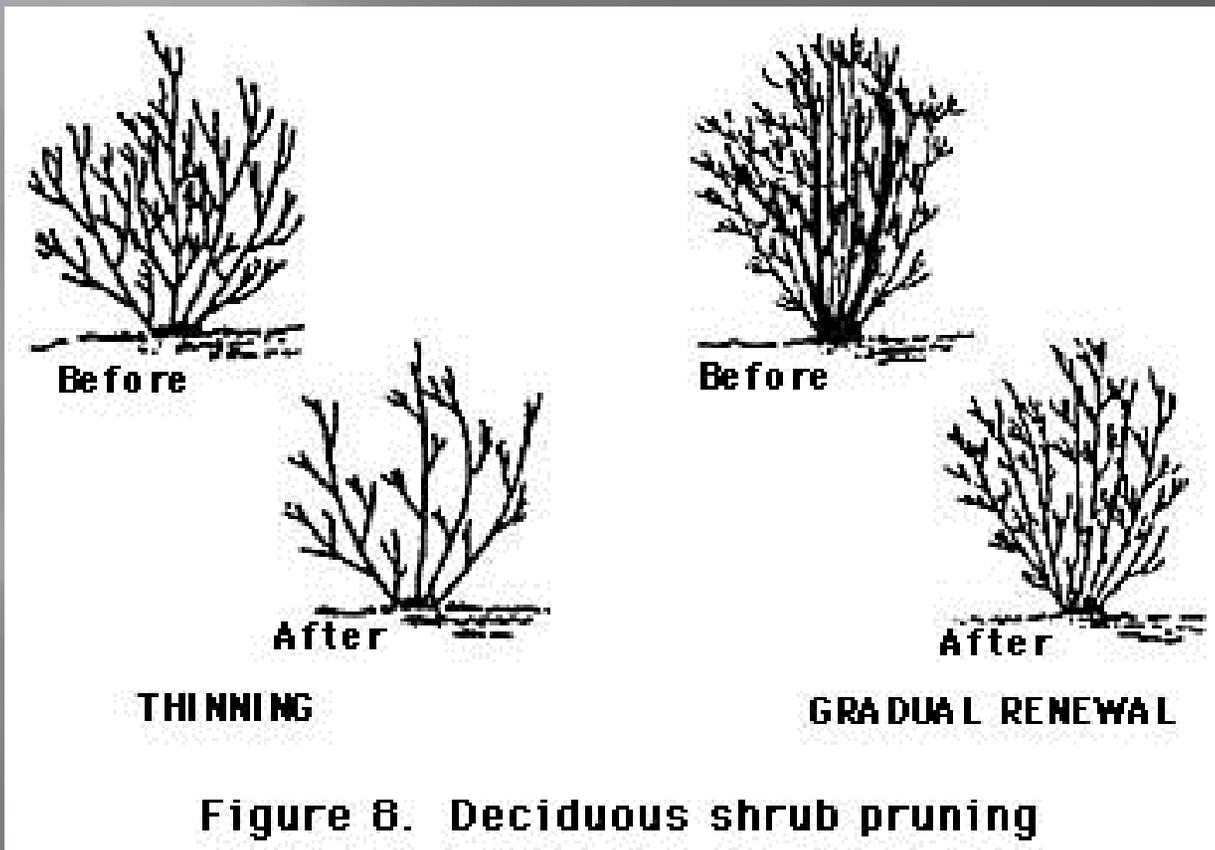
# Pruning 101



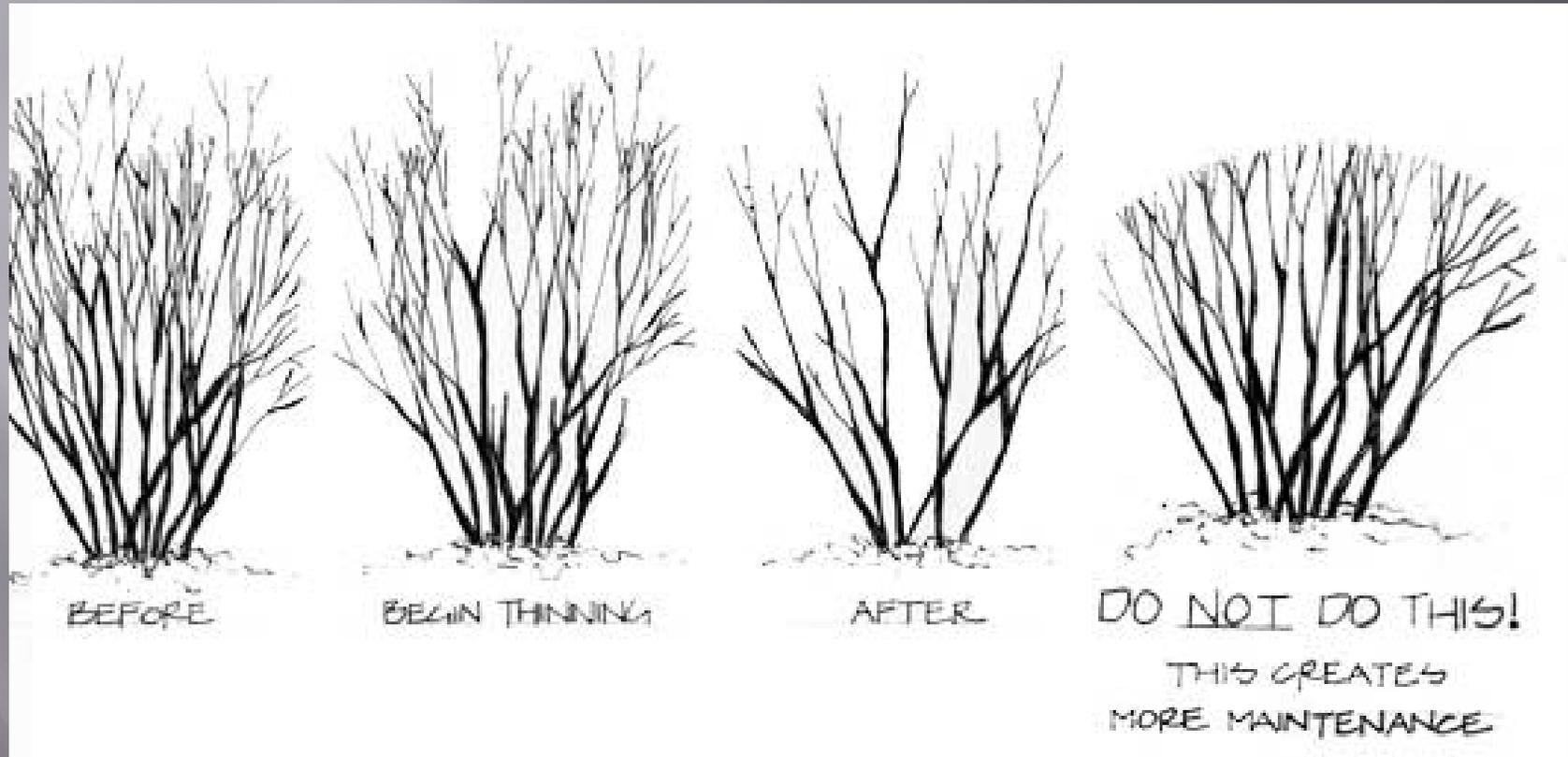
A natural shape is the goal



# Types of pruning



# A word to the wise...



Blueberries provide food for wildlife but consider the pH



# Maintenance schedule

- ▣ **Early spring** – before growth is 3-4 inches high
  1. Cut and remove dead stalks and seed heads
  2. Remove sticks and debris
  3. Prune shrubs if necessary
  4. Divide and move if needed
  5. Replenish mulch layer to maintain 3 inches

## Late spring and summer maintenance



- ▣ Remove weeds
- ▣ Water as needed during periods of drought
- ▣ Mow perimeter as needed being careful not to blow grass clippings into the rain garden

## Fall maintenance

- ▣ Remove weeds and diseased plants
- ▣ Remove excess leaves that fall into rain garden—2 to 3 inches of leaf litter is plenty
- ▣ **If the fall is dry—less than one inch of water a week**---any trees and shrubs in the rain garden must be watered up until late October. This is especially true for evergreens

# Enhancing a rain garden

- ▣ Rain gardens are all about function but sometimes location dictates some extra enhancement.



# A urban rain garden using containers



# Using stone as enhancement



Spring bulbs—not the best  
choice—plant on upper or berm  
area



Deer?

A garden is a  
commitment...