“Bring On the Rain”

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In order to be successful, every garden needs a little rain, right? The students at Dorcas Elementary School say “bring it on.” This small K-6th grade school is located in the Mill Creek watershed of Grant County and educates approximately 80+ students. With the assistance of the students and staff of the school, the campus now features a brand-new rain garden directly outside the front entrance of the school.

The Mill Creek watershed is the focus of a new water quality initiative by the West Virginia Chesapeake Bay Implementation Committee. This stream has been identified as a priority based upon fecal coliform level as well as other environmental concerns. The West Virginia Conservation Agency (WVCA) will soon be seeking Section 319 funding to begin addressing these issues.

Earth Day presented itself as the perfect opportunity for WVCA, the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, Potomac Valley Conservation District and the WVU Extension Potomac Valley Master Gardeners to partner and raise awareness of storm water runoff within the watershed. In the past, runoff from the roof of the school was piped directly down to the front of the school, made its way through the parking lot, and eventually ended up in a drainage ditch that fed the creek. Presently, the runoff drains directly into the constructed rain garden which is designed to absorb the rain water and filter out contaminants.

The project took several weeks to design and was installed over a two day period. One of the most important factors in designing a rain garden is determining the roof runoff area which allows for the proper sizing of the ponding area. The garden was completely excavated and the soil was replaced with a mixture of 50% sand, 30% soil and 20% compost. Master Gardeners spent the afternoon planting and mulching the garden. Students assisted the gardeners in transplanting many of the existing plants which were removed from the older flower beds. Several local residents assisted with removal of excess soil and clean-up and several businesses donated monetarily to the project. It was truly a community project with many dedicated volunteers! A rain barrel was also placed at a second downspout and the students will use the water collected to water the plants when needed. The children were particularly interested in the dynamics of the rain barrel and were surprised to learn the simplicity of the engineering.
The staff at the school held a competition which challenged the students to design the permanent sign which was erected in the garden upon completion. Taking top honors in the contest were Tori Weasonforth, sixth grade and Dylan Judy, second place, fifth grade.

In the end, this project will serve many purposes; an educational tool for the community, an environmental improvement for Mill Creek, and a bright spot for the campus.