

# Upstate Forever garden is a lesson in conservation

By Lark Reynolds  
Contributing Writer

Some gardens are grown primarily for the beauty, and some for fruits, vegetables or herbs, but the garden at the offices of Upstate Forever has a different purpose, and it mostly has to do with water – conserving it, and at the same time, hoarding it.

The conservation angle involves utilizing a host of native plants on the property that don't usually require much irrigation beyond natural rainfall. The hoarding aspect is focused on eliminating storm runoff from the property that would carry pollutants into local waterways.

"It's the idea of capturing and reusing the water from the site, instead of having runoff down into

## PROFILE

■ Garden: Office of Upstate Forever  
■ Location: Downtown, Pettigru Historic District  
■ Size: Roughly 3,500 square feet

Richland Creek, which gets into the Reedy River, which gets into Lake Greenwood," said Brad Wyche, Upstate Forever's executive director. "And also, it's the idea that we're not using drinking water for irrigating plants."

Upstate Forever is a non-profit organization with the two-fold mission of promoting sensible growth and protecting special places in the Upstate. The garden highlights two of the organization's main goals – improving water quality and creating sustainable communities – in addition to adding curb appeal to the



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Brad Wyche and Rick Huffman look at the rain garden with plants Swamp Hibiscus, Turtlehead plant, Red Cardinal flower and Cinnamon Fern.



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The rain garden in the front of the property includes Swamp Hibiscus.

office.

Wyche said creating sustainable communities means recognizing that growth in this area will continue, and planning it in a way that will preserve the Upstate's unique character.

Both the Upstate Forever office – a house on Pettigru Street that the organization renovated from top to bottom – and the garden were designed based on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design criteria. (Earlier this month, the organization was awarded a platinum rating – the high-

est possible – for the property.)

Rick Huffman, the landscape architect who designed the gardens, said the focus was on creating a plant community that reflects the natural flora of the area.

"If you embrace the plants that want to be here, then you're going to be successful as far as the way it looks, the way it grows, the way it's maintained," Huffman said.

The garden features an array of native plants, such as the Piedmont azalea, Indian Pink, Red Cardinal flower and Woo-

dland Aster. The property includes two rain gardens, where plants are clustered in a lowered bed so as to absorb storm runoff. The rain garden in the front of the property includes Swamp Hibiscus, Turtlehead plant and red cardinal flower in addition to some irises and ferns.

"They do a good job of handling the water that comes off the roof," Huffman said. "They can take it when it's dry, and they can take it when it's wet. They're flowery, they're pretty, they attract a lot of

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## Project emphasizes water conservation

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Turtlehead plant *Chelone glabra*.



Spiderwort *Tradescantia virginiana* grows in the garden.



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In front of the Upstate Forever offices are Gaillardia Blanket Flower, Purple Coneflower and Pink Muhley.

wildlife."

One of the LEED criteria for the landscaping was that there could be no permanent irrigation system, although a temporary system is permitted for a year. The garden at Upstate Forever was just planted last fall, so the temporary system is still in place, Huffman said, but will be taken up in the next month. The piping, though, will remain, and will carry water from a rain barrel in the back of the property to other areas of the garden, he said.

Along the sides of the house, channels were created to handle storm runoff and overflow from the rain barrel. Along the sides of these channels are plants you'd typically find on the banks of Upstate streams, such as Yellowroot and Green and Gold, a ground cover plant that sprouts small yellow flow-

ers in the spring.

"It will run across the ground, and eventually there will be a mass of this plant," Huffman said. "This plant is absolutely tough as nails, and a great, great ground cover."

The garden also features a walkway made of porous pavement, so that rainwater seeps through and is absorbed into the ground instead of collecting and running off into nearby waterways. A roof garden on one corner of the office also helps reduce storm runoff. The roof garden was created using a modular system and a lightweight slate composite soil.

Both the garden and the Upstate Forever office building are open to anyone interested in learning more about how to make their own homes, offices or gardens more sustainable, and about businesses that provide those services.



Green and Gold, Blue Cohosh and Crestid Iris are some native plants.



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A roof garden on one corner of the Upstate Forever office helps reduce storm runoff. There, Green and Gold, Crestid Iris and Sedums are planted.



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Piping will carry water from a rain barrel in the back of the property to other areas of the garden.