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Birches Elementary School installs rain garden in courtyard

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Birches second-grader Kaylee Luckiewicz works alongside Gloucester County Master Gardener Debbie Lubelski to plant marigolds at the school's rain garden.

WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP – After several months of planning, Birches Elementary School recently installed a rain garden in the school's courtyard that will serve as something its students can take ownership of this year and every year moving forward. Some of the final touches were put on the rain garden on Monday morning, as an enthusiastic group of about 50 students cleaned up the garden area and began planting flowers and plants under the watchful eye of the Gloucester County Master Gardeners.

A rain garden is a landscaped, shallow depression that allows rain and snowmelt to be collected and seep naturally into the ground. This helps recharge the groundwater supply and prevents a water quality problem called polluted runoff (nonpoint source pollution). Rain gardens are an important way to make cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live while enhancing ecological health. The sand-based terrain of the Birches courtyard is a perfect spot for the rain garden, as rain and snow runoff from the school roof will be broken down and pollution limited.

The installation of the rain garden was made possible by the Rutgers University Agricultural Experiment Station, and work was done under the expert supervision of Mrs. Mary Cummings, the head of the Gloucester County Extension of the Rutgers Agriculture and Resource Management Program. Master Gardeners Debbie Lubelski and Cindy D'Ortona, as well as Cindy's daughters, Angelina and Emily, who are Junior Master



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Gardeners, were on hand on Monday to help the students plant the rain garden.

According to Birches Talented and Gifted teacher Terry Boyajian, plans are being made to beautify the school courtyard even more, creating an outdoor classroom for the students to enjoy. County landscape architect Alan Koch will help with the project.



More than 50 Birches students helped with the installation of the rain garden.

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