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Rain Gardens Featured at Federation's Native Plant Festival

OCEAN – Ever wonder what to do with all that water sitting in your yard after a hard rain? You can find the solution at the N.C. Coastal Federation's Annual Native Plant Festival on Saturday, April 24.

The festival will run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at federation headquarters, 3609 N.C. 24 in Ocean in Carteret County – about halfway between Morehead City and Swansboro. The annual event is a fundraiser for the federation and proceeds benefit restoration projects.

"Our festival grows every year. We've added new artists, entertainment and education programs," said Frank Tursi, a federation associate director and one of the festival's organizers. "We're sure festival-goers will find something new, as well as popular elements that return every year – like our rain barrels."

One of the new features of this year's festival will be presentations on how to build a rain garden. Rain gardens are small depressions planted with native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers that collect and store stormwater and to allow it to soak into the ground instead of running off into the nearest creek or stream. They are simple and effective methods for reducing stormwater and coastal flooding. Federation staff will offer free instructions on where to place the rain gardens in your yard and how to build them. Many of the suitable plants will be available at the festival.

You'll want to spend the day at the festival and enjoy all the activities. Carteret County entertainment will be plentiful and include the Beaufort Chantey Men, who will sing the work songs of their ancestors who tended nets on the menhaden boats that once filled the Beaufort and Morehead City harbors. The Brass Consortium and Solar Winds will also perform.

Craftsmen and artists will surround the federation grounds with unique pieces of pottery, handmade items and coastal art. Scott Haines from Bridges Street Pottery will be back with his potter's wheel, demonstrating his skill.

The Marshallberg Community Club will be cooking and serving ham biscuits, barbeque, hot dogs and drinks for sale throughout the festival. The proceeds will be used to help save the community harbor that is under threat of development.

Of course, the main attraction is the more than 2,000 native plants, shrubs and trees. This year's collection boasts the best sellers of festivals past and some newcomers. There will be black

cherry trees, elderberry, blueberry and persimmon trees. New to the festival will be American hazelnut, American holly, coastal dog hobble, pignut hickory, winterberry and zenobia.

Federation members will get a sneak peek at the massive plant assortment on Friday, April 23, from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Members are required to show their membership card for admittance. Guests and visitors may join at that time. To learn more or to join, visit the federation's Web site at www.nccoast.org.