

# LANDSCAPE DESIGNS FOR STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

## Stormwater Control for Small Projects



Bay Area Stormwater  
Management Agencies  
Association



*Dry creek infiltrates and conveys runoff.*

Designing landscaped areas to soak up rainfall runoff from building roofs and paved areas helps protect water quality in local creeks and waterways. These landscape designs reduce polluted runoff and help prevent creek erosion.

As the runoff flows over vegetation and soil in the landscaped area, the water percolates into the ground and pollutants are filtered out or broken down by the soil and plants.

This fact sheet shows how you can design your landscape to absorb runoff from impervious surfaces, such as roofs, patios, driveways, and sidewalks, with landscape designs that can be very attractive.

If you are interested in capturing and storing water for irrigation use, see the Rain Barrel fact sheet in this series.

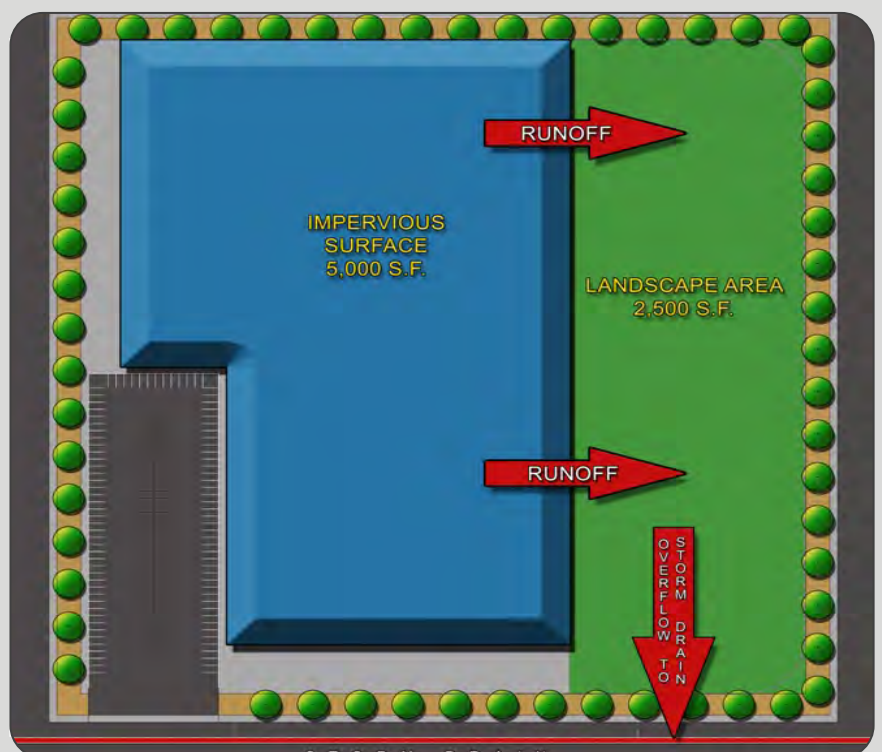
### Can My Project Manage Stormwater in the Landscape?

Directing stormwater runoff to the landscape is suitable for sites with the following conditions:

- Roofs, driveways, parking areas, patios, and walkways that can drain to an existing landscape, or an area that may be converted to landscape.
- Areas of landscape with a slope of 5% or less are preferred; check with the municipality regarding requirements for steeper sites.
- Works best in well-drained soil; soil amendments may be used in areas with poor drainage.
- Landscaped areas that total at least 1/2 the size of the impervious area draining to it.
- Direct runoff away from building foundations.
- Runoff should not create ponding around trees and plants that won't tolerate wet conditions.

### How Do I Size My Landscape?

The landscaped area should be 50% of the size of the contributing impervious surface. For example (see below), to manage runoff from a 5,000 square foot roof or paved surface, you should have 2,500 square feet of landscaping.



# Techniques to Manage Stormwater in Landscaping

## Direct Roof Runoff to Landscape

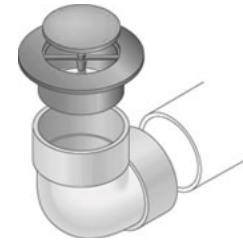
- Use additional piping to connect the downspout to the landscape if needed.
- Direct runoff away from building foundation.
- Prevent erosion by installing:
  - Splash blocks,
  - Rain chains,
  - Gravel area under a gutterless roof,
  - Pop-up drainage emitter connected to a pipe that carries runoff away from the foundation, or
  - Other energy dissipation technique.



*Splash block*



*Gravel area under a gutterless roof*

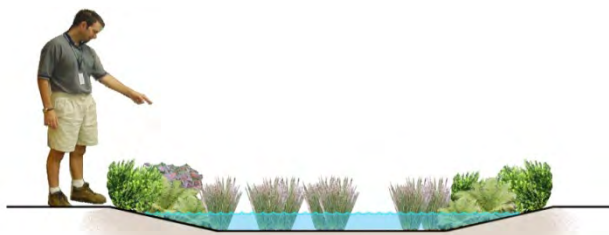


*Pop-up emitter*



*Rain chain*

## Swales or Dry Creeks



*Cross section*

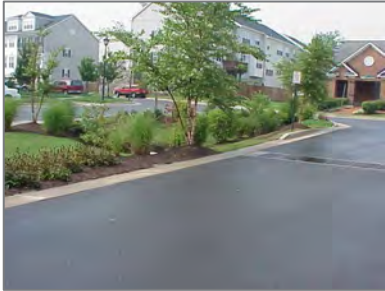


Swales and dry creeks are narrow, linear depressions designed to capture and convey water. Swales imitate a natural creek's ability to slow, infiltrate, and filter stormwater. To install a swale follow these steps:

- Excavate a narrow linear depression that slopes down to provide a flow path for runoff. The path length (10 to 15 feet or more) should meander to slow water and prevent erosion.
- Use plants from creek and river ecosystems to help reduce erosion and increase evaporation of runoff.
- The end of the swale requires an outlet for high flows (another landscaped area or a yard drain). Talk to municipal staff to identify an appropriate discharge location.
- Contact municipal staff for a local list of plants suitable for swales.

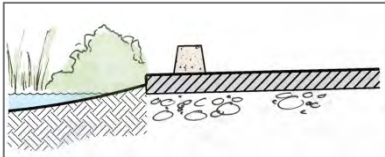
# Techniques to Manage Stormwater in Landscaping

## Direct Parking Lot Runoff to Landscape

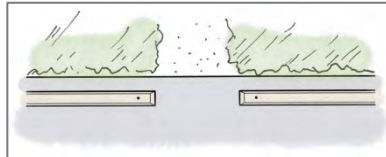


During storms, parking lots generate large amounts of runoff, which picks up oils, grease, and metals from vehicles. Landscaped areas can be designed to absorb and filter this runoff.

- Landscaped areas must be below the paved elevation. Allow an elevation change of 4 to 6 inches between the pavement and the soil, so that vegetation or mulch build-up does not block the flow.
- Grade the paved area to direct runoff towards the landscaping.
- If possible, provide a long path for runoff to infiltrate (while meeting the landscaped area sizing on page 1).
- Provide multiple access points for runoff to enter the landscape. Install curb cuts or separate wheel stops for the water to flow through. Provide cobbles or other permanent erosion control at points of concentrated flow.



*Cross section*

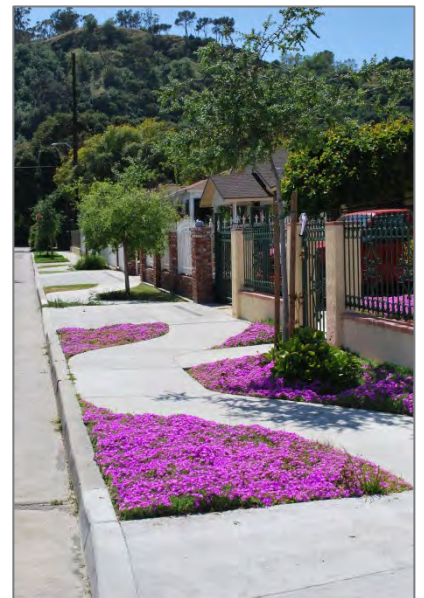


*View from above*

## Manage Runoff from Driveways/Small Paved Areas

Driveways, sidewalks, patios, walkways, and other small paved areas can offer creative opportunities to drain runoff to landscaping.

- Install landscape adjacent to the paved surface, and grade the paved area so runoff flows toward the landscaping.
- Landscaped areas must be below the paved elevation. Allow an elevation change of 4 to 6 inches between the pavement and the soil, so that vegetation or mulch build-up does not block the flow.
- Install cobbles or rocks where runoff enters the landscape to avoid erosion.
- Use sizing ratio described on page 1.
- Use drought-tolerant native or climate-adapted plants to reduce irrigation.



## Design Checklist

- ❑ Maximize the use of landscaping and natural areas that already exist. Try to design new landscapes immediately adjacent to impervious surfaces.
- ❑ Water should flow evenly (without concentrating runoff into small streams) from the impervious surface to the landscape; this will maximize the filtration and settling of sediment and pollutants and prevent erosion. The design should avoid allowing straight channels and streams to form.
- ❑ Amend soils to improve drainage, when necessary.
- ❑ If the project is located next to standard asphalt or concrete pavement, and there is concern about water undermining the pavement, include a water barrier in the design.
- ❑ Use curb cuts to create places where water can flow through to the landscape.
- ❑ Disconnect roof downspouts and redirect flow to adjacent landscapes. Disconnected downspout systems should incorporate a splash block to slow the runoff flow rate; a landscape flow path length of 10 to 15 feet is recommended.
- ❑ Use drought-tolerant native or climate-adapted plant species whenever possible. Avoid invasive or pest species. A list of invasive species may be found at the California Invasive Plant Council website ([www.cal-ipc.org](http://www.cal-ipc.org)). Contact municipal staff for a list of plants suitable for stormwater management areas.
- ❑ Design the landscape area so that overflow from large storms discharges to another landscaped area or the storm drain system to prevent flooding.

## Maintain Your Landscape

The following practices will help maintain your landscape to keep it attractive and managing stormwater runoff effectively.

- ❑ During dry months, irrigate during the first year to encourage root growth and establish the plants. In subsequent years, irrigate as needed by the plant species to maintain plant health.
- ❑ Repair signs of erosion immediately and prevent further erosion by reinforcing the surrounding area with ground cover or using rocks for energy dissipation.
- ❑ If standing water remains in the landscaped area for more than 4 days, use soil amendments to improve infiltration.
- ❑ Inspect the locations where water flows into a landscaped area from adjacent pavement to ensure that there is positive flow into the landscape, and vegetation or debris does not block the entrance point.



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