

CATCHING RAIN: Low Impact Development — Protecting Our Waters

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Low Impact Development (LID) is one way we can help keep our waterways, as well as the surrounding land, healthy and safe. This is a beautiful place to live, so it is no wonder that an additional 1.9 million people are expected to move here by 2040. As we grow, we replace forests and prairies with rooftops and pavement, thereby increasing stormwater runoff and the associated pathogens and chemicals it carries to our waterways. The health of humans and our ecosystems is threatened.

What's the problem with stormwater?

Stormwater is created by precipitation (rain or snowmelt) that doesn't soak into the earth but instead creates puddles and runs off. This stormwater can pick up pollution and carry it directly into storm drains, streams, rivers, lakes, inlets, and bays.

Some consequences of stormwater pollution and increased surface runoff include:

- Pollutants such as motor oil, yard chemicals, and pet wastes contaminate local waterways, threatening human health and wildlife health.
- Numerous beaches are too polluted to harvest shellfish.
- Several fish species face the threat of extinction.
- Groundwater is not replenished, decreasing drinking water supplies and drying out streambeds.
- Winter rain quickly runs off paved surfaces and into streams, leading to the scouring of stream channels.

What is Low Impact Development and how can it help?

LID seeks to manage stormwater onsite—either by encouraging it to soak into the ground or using plants to transpire it back to the atmosphere. LID helps keep pollution out of our waterways. It focuses on recreating or protecting existing natural landscape features to minimize the amount of impervious (hard) surfaces. Stormwater is then treated with soils that have been amended with compost, vegetation, and other techniques.

LID strategies can be used in virtually every situation—residential homes or commercial businesses, in rural or urban settings. Some benefits include:

- Creates more beautiful and easily managed landscapes.
- Encourages water to soak into the ground, replenishing drinking water supplies.
- Reduces contamination of local waterways, including recreational and shellfish growing areas.
- Preserves or restores trees and other vegetation, attracting birds, butterflies and other wildlife.
- Can reduce development costs (decreased infrastructure and land clearing costs) as well as stormwater management costs.

Vegetation Preservation and Restoration

During site development, clearing and grading should be minimized as much as possible. This will protect native soils and vegetation while also preventing compacted soils that do not allow water to soak in as readily. Mature trees are not easy to replace and their contribution to managing stormwater run off and preventing erosion is invaluable. When clearing land, small native plants can be removed and saved for replanting once development is complete.

Reducing lawn sizes and replacing that space with native or water-wise plants reduces maintenance and watering needs and may reduce the need for fertilizers and pesticides.

Look for the other helpful fact sheets in this series:

- ✓ 1. **Low Impact Development**
- 2. LID Stormwater Regulations
- 3. LID Development Process
- 4. Pavement Maintenance
- 5. Rain Garden Maintenance
- 6. Rain Garden Construction Checklist
- 7. Rain Garden Construction Sequencing



Green roof, Portland, OR. Photo: Erica Guttman

Amending Soils

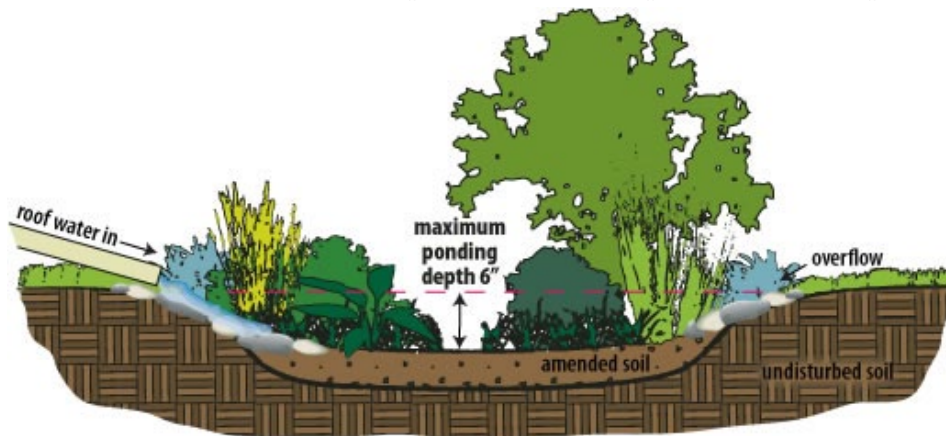
Healthy soil grows healthier plants, allows stormwater to soak in, stores water for plants in the summer, and reduces the need for chemicals such as pesticides and fertilizers.

Where soil must be disturbed, breaking up compaction, replacing topsoil or tilling in compost is very beneficial.

Rain Gardens

Rain gardens are a landscape amenity that also serves to treat polluted runoff and manage drainage by using natural processes: plants and soils work together to filter and absorb water from streets, rooftops, driveways and other hard surfaces.

This landscaping technique is beautiful and inviting to birds and butterflies. Using native plants and amended soils can reduce maintenance needs. Rain gardens can be constructed in many different shapes and can be landscaped with a variety of plants.



Managing Water on Roofs

Green Roofs:

Green roofs are a great way to absorb and slow down roof runoff. They improve aesthetics to the residence or business as well as reduce noise and lower heating and cooling costs. Unlike conventional roofs, green roofs have less UV degradation, so they last much longer—it is recommended that after 50 years the waterproof membrane be replaced, but all other components can be reused on the same roof!

Directing Downspouts:

If green roofs are not an option, water can be directed from downspouts to areas such as a rain garden or planted area (versus pavement), where it can soak into the ground.

Rainwater Harvesting:

Rainwater harvesting combines two important LID goals: reduce flows from rooftops, and conserve water that comes from drinking-water supplies. Rainwater can be collected in rain barrels or cisterns where it can be stored. The collected water can then be used for a variety of things such as watering and cleaning jobs around the outside of homes.



Compost in landscapes filters and slows rainwater and results in healthier soils and plants. *Photo: Erica Guttman*



A rain garden is an attractive way to manage polluted runoff on site. *Photo: Erica Guttman*



Photos: Erica Guttman, Nora Moloney





Ribbon driveway, steppable plants with stones, permeable concrete & permeable pavement.
Photos: Curtis Hinman, Erica Guttman, Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute



Options to Reduce Hard Surfaces

Driveways and walkways often account for a large amount of impervious area surrounding homes. Several LID solutions allow stormwater runoff to soak into the earth, preventing pollution from entering waterways and decreasing possible flooding risks.

Driveways and Parking Lots:

Many beautiful and functional materials and strategies allow rainwater to soak into driveways and parking lots. Reducing the length and width of driveway and parking areas is a perfect way to start reducing impermeable surfaces. Some style and material alternatives include the ribbon driveway, broken-concrete mosaic, permeable pavers, grid aggregate containment systems, pervious concrete and porous asphalt.

Walkways, Patios, and Decks:

Traditional concrete or mortared patios and walkways can be replaced with a variety of LID options. Raised decks made from recycled plastics are an excellent alternative. Walkways and patios can be constructed using stones or broken concrete with plantings in the gaps between stones to absorb water. Pervious systems, including stone pavers and interlocking plastic grids are great options as well.



Photo: PIN Foundations

Foundations

When planning new construction or an addition to a home or business, a key strategy is to disturb soils as little as possible. Two LID techniques include:

Small Footprint:

A building's footprint can be reduced by decreasing the amount of space taken up all together or by creating two stories instead of a large one-story.

Minimal-excavation Foundation:

A minimal-excavation foundation dramatically limits soil disturbance over traditional grading and foundation installation.

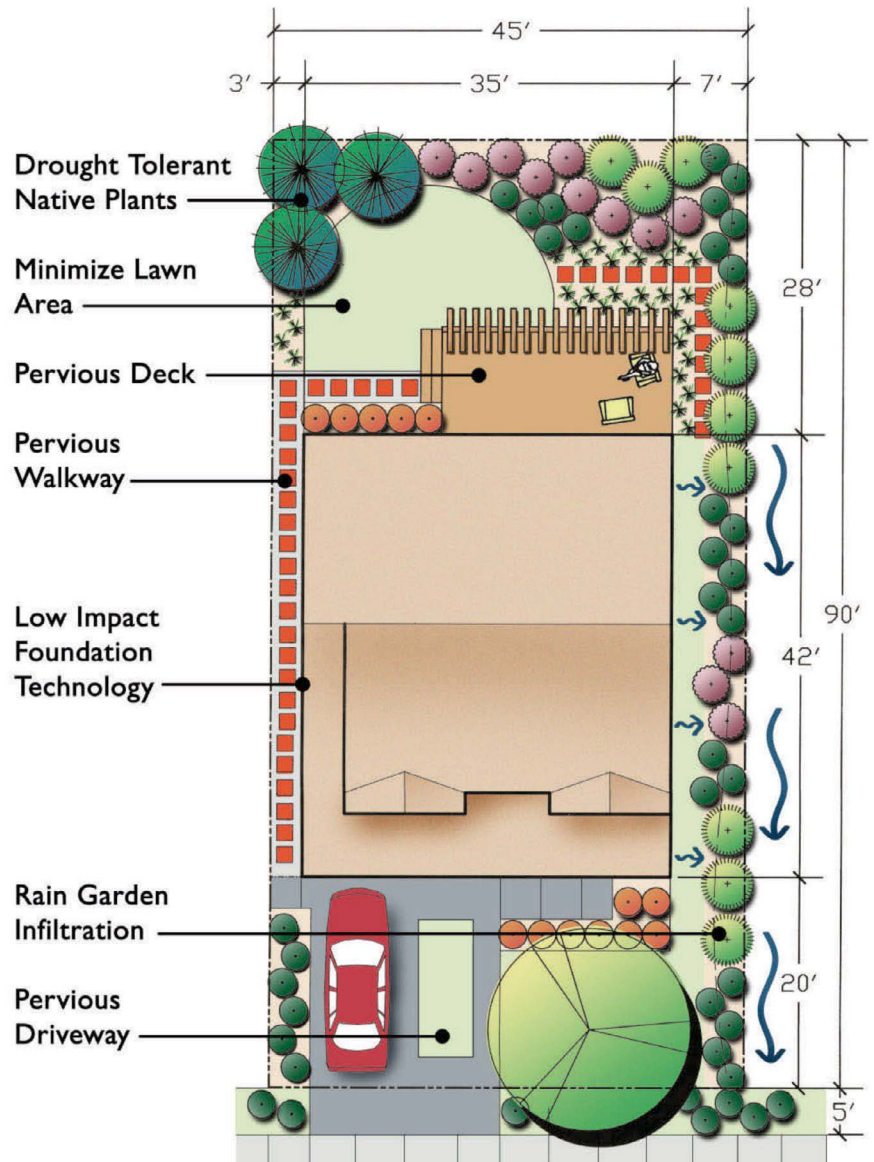


Residential Area with LID Features

LID practices may be incorporated around homes and businesses in countless ways. Just a few methods can be used or an entire lot can be designed and developed using LID techniques for everything from building design to landscape design. These techniques create beautiful homes and yards, keeping the sites safer from flooding risks. Utilizing LID methods helps to absorb polluted water into the earth, which protects water bodies, wildlife, and human health.



Pervious pavers filter and manage water on site.
Photo: Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute.



Resources:

- Washington Stormwater Center: <http://www.wastormwatercenter.org/>
- Washington Department of Ecology: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/>
- Puget Sound Partnership: <http://www.psp.wa.gov/stormwater.php>
- Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington: Local Stormwater Programs and Regulations
<http://www.mrsc.org/subjects/environment/water/sw-local.aspx>
- EPA Low Impact Development: <http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/green/>
- WSU Rain Garden Website: <http://raingarden.wsu.edu>

Online Publications and Videos:

- 2012 Stormwater Management Manual for Western Washington
<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/stormwater/manual.html>
- Low Impact Development Technical Guidance Manual for Puget Sound
http://www.psp.wa.gov/LID_manual.php
- Building a Raingarden: Keeping our Pacific Northwest Waters Clean Video: <http://vimeo.com/21474307>
- Raingarden Handbook for Western Washington Homeowners
http://county.wsu.edu/mason/nrs/water/Documents/Raingarden_handbook.pdf

