

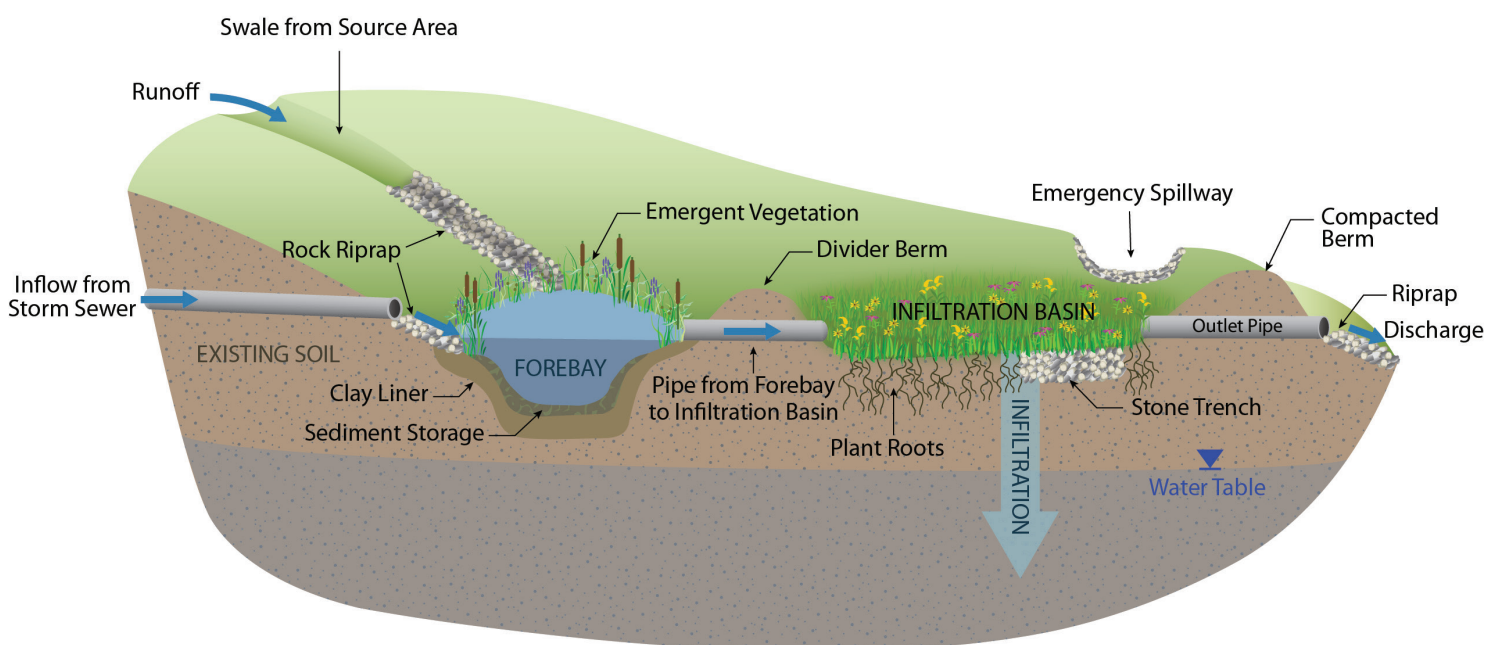
INFILTRATION BASINS

Guidelines for Maintenance

An **infiltration basin** is a storm water best management practice (BMP) designed to capture runoff and let it soak into the ground—a process called infiltration. The basin is carefully engineered to infiltrate runoff volumes from the specific land area, or watershed that drains to the basin. Runoff will enter the infiltration basin through a combination of underground pipes, ditches and overland flow. A small pond, or forebay, is usually constructed at the inflow area to trap sediment and attached pollutants before entering the infiltration basin. This can help prevent plugging the soils in the infiltration basin.

The bottom of the infiltration basin is flat, wide and planted with vegetation specifically designed to encourage infiltration (see page 2). There may be a stone-filled trench constructed within the basin bottom or near the perimeter to further enhance infiltration, especially during frozen ground periods. The basin will usually have an overflow pipe and an emergency spillway to handle runoff events that exceed the design capacity. The infiltration basin is generally designed not to pond runoff in the basin for more than a few days at a time.

An infiltration basin may act like a leaky pond, but they are very effective at protecting local lakes, rivers and downstream properties from water pollution and flooding caused by urban runoff. Infiltrating runoff also helps replenish the groundwater, the source of drinking water for 80% of Wisconsin residents. Groundwater also supports water levels in local lakes and base flows in streams, especially during periods of dry weather.



Note: Rain gardens are essentially small infiltration basins. They are designed to capture and infiltrate runoff from small watersheds such as a rooftop, driveway or small parking lot. Some roadside or backyard swales are also designed as small infiltration practices.

THE NATIVE LANDSCAPE

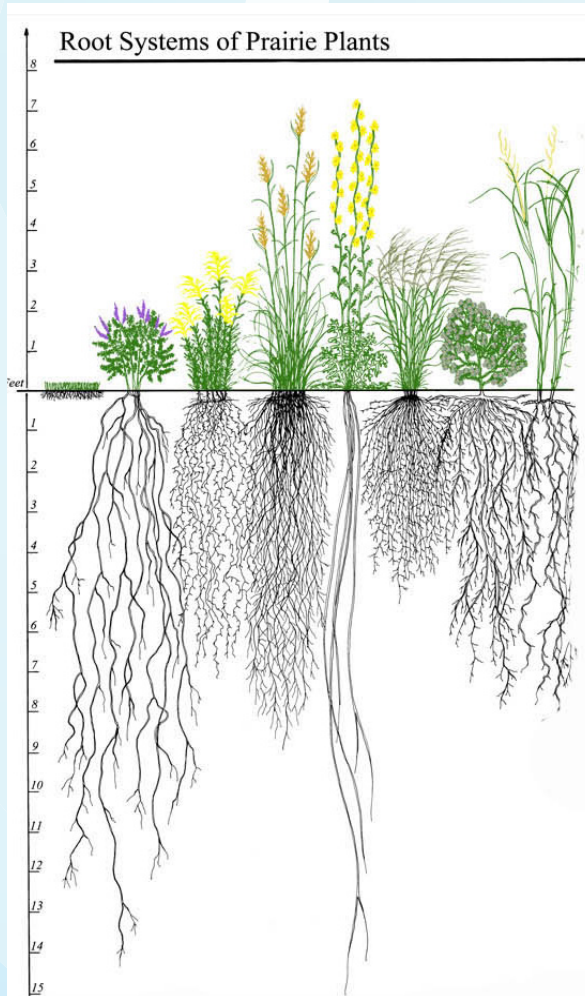


Image Source: Conservation Resource Institute

Before our landscape was developed, very little rainfall actually ran off the ground. Most of it soaked into the soil, where it was either used by plants or became part of the groundwater system. Native plants are used in infiltration basins to help replicate some of these conditions. Native plants have very deep root systems with as much as two-thirds of the plant being underground. This massive root system improves the soil, creating more pathways for infiltration, and making the basin more effective at soaking up runoff and filtering pollutants. By comparison, turf grass (pictured at far left in the illustration) only has a few inches of root mass. Other benefits of using native plants include:

- Creating habitat and food sources for birds, butterflies, bees and other wildlife.
- Absorbing more nutrients in runoff like phosphorous and nitrogen, which cause algae blooms and excessive weed growth in lakes and streams.
- Improving aesthetics of the infiltration basin, providing year round interest and color with a mix of wildflowers and grasses.
- Reducing maintenance needs (once established), such as mowing, watering (plants are drought resistant), or use of fertilizer or pesticide.

MANAGING THE WATERSHED: WHAT HOMEOWNERS CAN DO

Many infiltration basins are owned by a group of landowners and maintained through a homeowner association within a subdivision. In addition to maintaining the basin, there are actions that each homeowner can take to manage the land that drains to the basin. The following will help extend the life of the basin and reduce water pollution at the same time:

- Regularly sweep litter and grass clippings off sidewalks, driveways, streets and parking lots.
- Test the soil in landscaped areas, and follow recommended application rates for fertilizers and pesticides.
- Pick up after pets. This also helps keep excess nutrients and bacteria out of the basin.
- Minimize salt application to impervious areas. Salt generally passes through the basin soils, damaging the plants and polluting the receiving surface and groundwater resources.
- Prevent sediment from leaving construction sites. The more sediment that enters the basin, the sooner it will require expensive soil restoration or replanting.

MAINTENANCE FOR INFILTRATION BASINS

DO-IT-YOURSELF

There are some maintenance jobs that can—and should—be regularly attended to by the owner of the infiltration basin. This includes:

- Inspect and remove debris in the forebay, or near the inflow or outlet pipes, stone trench and spillway.
- Remove weeds by carefully spot-applying herbicide rather than by pulling. This is because pulling weeds disturbs the soil and provides an opening for invasive species to grow.

ENLIST A PROFESSIONAL

Besides the maintenance that an owner can do, a qualified inspector should be hired annually to inspect and repair the following, as needed:

- The condition of the forebay, including the amount of sediment build-up or liner damage. Take soil cores if needed to evaluate liner. Patch holes and remove burrowing animals, if necessary.
- The condition of the pipes, swales or structures where water flows into and out of the basin.
- Erosion of side slopes, embankments, inlet/outlet, and emergency spillway, including the condition of rock riprap and underlying filter fabric.
- Detect the presence of invasive species. Develop a plan for their removal if necessary.
- Soft spots or settling that may have occurred in the embankment.
- Remove excessive dead plant material in the early spring.
- Replant with different species if an original plant dies out. The original plant may have been unsuitable for the soil type or degree of wetness.
- Water native plants during establishment only. Once established, watering won't be necessary.
- Diagnose any reported prolonged ponding (more than three days). Evaluate the condition of the soils, taking core samples and testing infiltration rates, if needed.
- Burn every-other-year in April where feasible. Otherwise, mow in late spring or very early summer to a height of 4 to 6 inches. The purpose is to cut the weeds before they can go to seed, and do it before the native plants start to really shoot up. This cutting height generally requires a brush hog or similar device. A normal lawn mower will cut it too short.
- Remove any large trees growing in the embankment and re-compact the soil as needed.
- Develop plans to repair damaged structures, plantings or forebay liners, to remove sediment or enhance soil infiltration rates (aeration, tillage, etc.), if necessary.

For a sample inspection report, visit:
www.waukeshacounty.gov/cleanwater.

Enforcement of Infiltration Basin Maintenance

Maintenance responsibilities for infiltration basins are usually documented as a deed restriction or a maintenance agreement that was recorded on the property when the basin was built. Maintenance can also be required through a local ordinance to meet clean water laws. The local municipality or storm water utility district is the likely regulatory agency for maintenance. Either way, the regulatory agency can require the owner(s) of an infiltration basin to perform and report inspections and to complete repairs and maintenance activities as needed. If the owner(s) fails to comply, the regulatory agency may resort to citations or other enforcement measures, or may perform the maintenance activities itself and recover the costs through special charges on the property tax bill.