

A Homeowner's Guide to Managing Residential Stormwater Runoff

What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is any precipitation (rain or snowmelt) that comes down from the sky and flows across land. In natural areas, much of the precipitation infiltrates into soil or gets absorbed by vegetation. In urban areas with lots of development, stormwater rapidly runs off of roofs, driveways and streets and picks up pollutants in its path. The water that flows in our storm drains flows directly into our waterways, without passing through a water treatment plant, so it is important that only rain goes down storm drains.

Why is Stormwater Runoff a Problem?

Water Pollution. Stormwater runoff picks up pollutants like oil, lawn fertilizers, pesticides, trash, and pet waste that have the potential to contaminate our waterways. These pollutants affect water quality and the freshwater ecosystem as a whole. If local drinking water sources are polluted, they are harder and more costly to treat.

Flooding. Stormwater is a main contributor to flooding. Because water flows so rapidly over impervious surfaces, stream levels rise and flood quicker than normal.

Erosion. Stormwater flows into streams at rapid speeds and in large volumes, which can cause severe streambank erosion. Eroded banks contribute to sediment build-up in ponds and lakes and can harm aquatic habitats.

Protective Stream Buffers

A Riparian Stream Buffer is the area around a stream on either side. This area helps filter out pollutants, provides habitat for plants and animals that rely on the stream, and helps to absorb and slow down runoff. Some streams and buffers are easy to identify, while others may seem to function only as a ditch that carries stormwater during or immediately after a rainfall. In Athens, stream buffers are protected for 75 feet on both sides of the stream bank (a larger buffer than the state requires). Certain activities, like construction or vegetation clearing, is strictly prohibited within the buffer unless an Environmental Areas permit is granted from Athens-Clarke County.

What Can Homeowners Do to Help?

- Reduce the amount of impervious area on your property so that more rain can soak into the ground. Use permeable pavers when possible.
- Plant native trees and plants in your yard which encourage infiltration and provide valuable habitat for animals and insects.
- Install a rain barrel to capture rainwater from your roof.
- Install a rain garden with native vegetation to capture stormwater and encourage infiltration.
- Properly dispose of leaf and limb debris by bagging it for pick-up, taking it to the ACC Landfill, or adding it to a contained compost pile away from water. Visit accgov.com/1320/Leaf-Limb for ACC's Leaf and Limb pick-up schedule.
- If you live close to a detention facility or pond, avoid making drastic changes to your landscape. This can affect the way water is routed to those stormwater facilities.
- If you have a stream or tributary in your backyard, don't mow right up to the water's edge. Leave a section along the water where grass, shrubs and trees can grow freely. If you must maintain this area for safety purposes, leave the grass and vegetation at least 6 to 12 inches high.
- Don't cut down trees near water. Tree roots hold stream banks in place, prevent erosion, and provide shade to the water to keep it from heating up in the sun.
- Follow directions carefully when applying fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. They are very likely to end up in our waterways; if not immediately, then with the next rain. Avoid using these within a stream buffer.
- If you need to work in a stream buffer, contact the ACC Planning Department at 706-613-3515. You may need a permit.



Athens-Clarke County Stormwater Management Program

706-613-3440

stormwater@accgov.com

www.accgov.com/stormwater