

# Vegetated Swale *Maintenance*



Photo courtesy of York County Conservation District

## *What is a vegetated swale?*

A vegetated swale is an open channel that collects stormwater and allows it to infiltrate into the ground. The grass or plants covering the side slopes and bottom provide a filtration surface for the water and help slow the flow rate. Many swales have an underdrain pipe to manage larger storms. Some swales have stone check dams to help slow the flow rate, promote infiltration, and prevent erosion. Swales are commonly found along roads, near parking lots, or between properties in residential areas.

## *Maintenance you can perform:*

**Vegetated swales need regular maintenance, including:**

- **Removing trash and debris**
- **Mowing**

### *As needed:*

- ✓ Inspect your swale after storms for erosion and to make sure that stormwater has drained.
- ✓ Remove sediment and debris from in and around the swale.
- ✓ Reseed any bare areas.
- ✓ Water during the initial establishment period.

### *Seasonally:*

- ✓ Mow grass no shorter than 3 inches. Remove or compost tall grass clippings.
- ✓ Manually remove any weeds or invasive plants.
- ✓ Remove or compost leaves, as they may smother the grass and block the flow of water.

### *Avoid:*

- ✗ Don't use fertilizer or pesticides in your swale.
- ✗ Don't over-mow.



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## Why is it important to maintain your swale?

An unmaintained swale may:

- Cause stormwater to pool on the surface and become a breeding place for insects
- Stop filtering the stormwater and allow pollutants to enter our local streams
- Block the flow of water and cause flooding

**By maintaining your swale, you are doing your part to protect your local streams and the Chesapeake Bay.**



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Vegetated swale

## Recommended maintenance checklist

- Leaf and Debris Removal**  
January through December
- Mowing**  
April through September
- Repair Eroded Areas**  
As needed



Residential grass drainage swale

## Problem solving . . .

### Standing water

**POSSIBLE CAUSE:** If standing water occurs for over 48 hours, the swale could be clogged or the underdrain pipe may be blocked.

**SOLUTION:** The surface of the swale may need to be tilled and replanted, or the pipe may need to be cleaned.

### Erosion

**POSSIBLE CAUSE:** Runoff is moving too fast and/or the vegetation has died.

**SOLUTION:** Stabilize the soil by planting new vegetation. Use rocks if needed to slow the flow.

**You can prolong the life of your swale and save on maintenance costs by keeping your site clean and regularly inspecting and maintaining the facility to ensure it is functioning properly.**

**If you have questions or need more information, please visit [cbf.org](http://cbf.org).**