

“A Conversation with Greenable Woodbridge”... Low Impact Development

In the simplest terms, there are two ways to address stormwater pollution in the watershed; keep it from happening in the first place, or clean it up after the fact. Today we're going to talk about that first idea in terms of a concept called “Low Impact Development” or “LID”.

LID is an idea that is quickly gaining ground in the United States. The premise is that instead of cleaning up pollution from stormwater runoff after it happens, we should be changing the way we develop land to keep it from happening in the first place. LID can take a number of different shapes, all with the focus on slowing down the rate at which water moves through the environment in developed areas.

An inexpensive example that residents of Woodbridge can do on their own is the use of rain barrels. Rain barrels are generally 55-gallon plastic barrels that are connected to a home's gutter to collect rainwater, rather than allowing it to move through the environment. They are particularly useful for residents that maintain their own gardens, as the collected rainwater can be used to supply the garden with water. Rain barrels can be purchased ready to go, but it is often more fun (and less expensive) to create your own rain barrel. Instructions are easy to find online and can be easily used for projects for various community groups.

Another key LID strategy is the use of rain gardens. A rain garden is used as collection and infiltration points for stormwater. They are planted in a lower area than the land around them, encouraging the water to drain into them where it is collected by the roots of the various plants in the garden. It is highly recommended that plants used are native to the area, not only to avoid introducing invasive species, but also because native plants are already adapted for our climate and will need less work to keep alive. The Township currently maintains a rain garden at the Health Center.

There are many other types of LID technologies, but frequently they are not appropriate to the area. As Woodbridge Township is almost entirely built out, replacing existing development with new LID technologies is often prohibitively expensive for property owners. Such technologies could include permeable pavements for parking lots or driveways that allow water to infiltrate into the ground beneath the pavement, or various water retention technologies that are designed to collect water and slow down its movement through the environment.

Within Woodbridge, stress on the watershed is being reduced by encouraging mixed-use development where appropriate. By concentrating various land uses in a single area, the strain on natural resources is decreased allowing for a more sustainable community. However, the people who are going to have the greatest impact on reducing stormwater runoff in the community are those of you reading this now. By changing how you use water, and encouraging others to do so, we will be a long way towards protecting our watershed.