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# Homeowner's Guide to Drainage



**THE TOWN OF ARLINGTON**

5854 Airline Road, Arlington, TN 38002



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# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Drainage Around Your Home or Property .....	2
How Do I Tell if I have Flooding Problems?.....	2
How Do I Tell What Conditions Exist?.....	2
What Do I Need to Consider?.....	3
Solving the Problem.....	4
Hints for Homeowners.....	5

# Hints for Homeowners

- Keep all drainage swales open and clear of debris. Do NOT modify them.
- Proper planting of slopes prevents erosion. Keep plants watered, but do not overwater. Replant barren areas.
- Do not let conditions on your property create a problem for your neighbors. Talk to your neighbors about drainage issues in your neighborhood, and work with them to minimize problems.
- Be careful when directing runoff towards your neighbor. You could be held liable in civil court if it is proven that you damaged your neighbor's property. It is unlawful to divert flows from their natural path to the detriment of your neighbors.
- Make inspections during rains. This is when trouble occurs. Watch for gullying. Correct problems as soon as possible.
- Normal property drainage must flow to the street or an approved drainage device. Obstructions such as patios, sidewalks, and decks must not be placed in side swales unless an alternate method of drainage is provided.
- Ask questions before changing the drainage around your home. Check with your Homeowners Association or Town employees prior to making changes.
- Call before you dig! Dial 811 and have utilities located on and around your lot before digging anywhere on your property.
- Allow runoff to soak into the ground. By doing this, less waste is sent downstream for others to manage and fewer nutrients and other pollutants are being carried off your lot.
- Notify someone if an inlet is plugged or water backs up repeatedly in the same location. Contact a Homeowners Association board member, Town Hall, or Public Works!



# Solving the Problem

## Control Heavy Runoff

Runoff from roof downspouts, impervious areas, and neighboring properties can be heavy during storms and your lawn or property can become flooded for a short period of time. Stormwater runoff can either be redirected or captured for better control.

## Stop Erosion

Yard erosion occurs when the soil is washed off the property by runoff. Yard erosion leaves behind bare spots, gullies, and scouring. Eroded sediment can be left behind on driveways, sidewalks, or flat areas.

## Gutters and Downspouts

Wetness or erosion near foundation walls and drip line can be very damaging. Possible causes include gutters that need to be cleaned or are undersized, downspouts, and poor grading around foundation walls.

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*The “Civil Law Rule” states that the “property owner” who causes damages by disturbing the natural flow of water IS LIABLE.\**

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## Wet Areas in the Yard

This can include puddles or sogginess on the property in the days following a rainstorm, or wetness for months regardless of the weather. Wet conditions can be found in isolated spots, widespread areas of the lawn, or areas near gutters and downspouts.

\*Property owners have the responsibility of allowing stormwater runoff to enter and exit his/her property without altering impacts upstream or downstream of his/her property. The southeastern United States uses the “Civil Law Rule” to govern drainage disputes between property owners.

# Introduction



Drainage and flooding problems in and around your home can be a costly and damaging nuisance. Common actions taken by you, the homeowner, in the process of developing your lot or landscaping your yard can create flooding and drainage problems. These problems can, however, often be prevented by following certain guidelines.

## What is stormwater?

Stormwater is a natural occurrence. It is the water from falling rain or melting snow. Impervious surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, and roads prevent water from being absorbed into the ground. The portion of water that is not absorbed into the ground is what is known as stormwater runoff.

## Why is stormwater management important?

Water that is not absorbed into the ground flows downstream, and if it is not managed properly, the excess flow can cause flooding issues. Traditional stormwater management has focused on preventing flooding by removing quantities of water from streets and neighborhoods.

# Drainage around Your Home

## How do I tell if I have a potential drainage or flooding problem on my property?

If any of the following conditions exist, you could potentially have a flooding or drainage problem:

- Is any part of my house lower than the surrounding ground such that water cannot flow freely away from your house?
- Is the property located within a FEMA mapped floodplain? Is there a wetland near your property?
- Is there a dedicated drainage easement on or near your property?
- Is there a natural drainage way (stream or channel) or manmade drainage channel (swale or ditch) on or near your property?
- Is there a stormwater storage basin on or by your property?
- Can roof runoff flow safely away from your house? Does your yard have areas that have settled over time?

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*It is important to understand that stormwater facilities have limits of capacity, and each swale, ditch, storm sewer, etc., at times, may be exceeded during an event. No person or property is ever truly free of risk of flooding and drainage concerns.*

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## How can I determine if any of the above conditions exist on my property?

- Safely observe how your property drains during a storm event.
- Look for evidence of flow (erosion), ponding (overgrown vegetation), or drainage features (grates, drainpipes, culverts) on your property.
- Examine the deed and title to your property for disclosures and restrictions.
- Talk with neighbors and understand their perspectives and experiences with drainage in the area.
- Check the recorded plat for your subdivision and/or lot for Stormwater and/or Drainage Easements. Read and understand their purpose and your maintenance responsibility.
- Check the FEMA flood insurance rate maps for floodplain locations.  
<https://msc.fema.gov/portal>

## Are there things I need to consider related to drainage if I install a retaining wall, fence, accessory structure, or landscaping?

- If you have a drainage way, swale, channel, etc. on your property, do not place structures (sheds, garages), landscaping walls, trees/bushes, fences, and any debris (e.g. grass clippings) in the area.
- Structures and landscaping built across drainage flows paths or channels can dam up runoff water or divert it, creating some of the most serious flooding problems. Walls, fences, and other structures and materials should avoid encroaching into a drainage area and/or drainage easement.
- When installing a fence, leave area beneath the fence for water to pass without altering the natural flow.
- Consider alternatives to concrete or asphalt-paved surfaces, e.g. brick, gravel, wood chips, stone slab, because they are more porous. If areas must be paved, keep it to a minimum and direct runoff onto grassy areas and storm sewers.
- Design and construct the landscape topography to facilitate stormwater drainage and infiltration.
- Instead of turf grass, try using a natural vegetation in your landscaping – it has a deeper root system and allows for more water infiltration.
- Mulch and plant any exposed soil as soon as possible after construction. Washed off soil can clog storm drains over time and cause swales and drainage ways to lose capacity. Use sediment barriers when necessary.
- Avoid excessive soil compaction and disturbance to your lot.
- Avoid hooking downspouts directly into the storm sewer or onto paved surfaces. These should discharge directly on a grassed or planted surface; however, be careful not to discharge directly onto the property line and/or impact neighboring properties.

