ENHANCED GRASS SWALES

CVC/TRCA LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT
PLANNING AND DESIGN GUIDE - FACT SHEET

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Enhanced grass swales are vegetated open channels designed to convey, treat and attenuate stormwater runoff (also referred to as enhanced vegetated swales). Check dams and vegetation in the swale slows the water to allow sedimentation, filtration through the root zone and soil matrix, evapotranspiration, and infiltration into the underlying native soil. Simple grass channels or ditches have long been used for stormwater conveyance, particularly for roadway drainage. Enhanced grass swales incorporate design features such as modified geometry and check dams that improve the contaminant removal and runoff reduction functions of simple grass channel and roadside ditch designs.

Where development density, topography and depth to water table permit, enhanced grass swales are a preferred alternative to both curb and gutter and storm drains as a stormwater conveyance system. When incorporated into a site design, they can reduce impervious cover, accent the natural landscape, and provide aesthetic benefits.

DESIGN GUIDANCE

GEOMETRY AND SITE LAYOUT

- Shape: Should be designed with a trapezoidal or parabolic cross section. Trapezoidal swales will generally evolve into parabolic swales over time, so the initial trapezoidal cross-section design should be checked for capacity and conveyance assuming it is a parabolic cross-section. Swale length between culverts should be 5 metres or greater.
- Bottom Width: Should be designed with a bottom width between 0.75 and 3.0 metres. Should allow for shallow flows and adequate water quality treatment, while preventing flows from concentrating and creating gullies.
- Longitudinal Slope: Slopes should be between 0.5% and 4%. Check dams should be incorporated on slopes greater than 3%.
- Length: When used to convey and treat road runoff, the length simply parallels the road, and therefore should be equal to, or greater than the contributing roadway length.
- Flow Depth: A maximum flow depth of 100 mm is recommended during a 4 hour, 25 mm Chicago storm event.
- Side Slopes: Should be as flat as possible to aid in providing pretreatment for lateral incoming flows and to maximize the swale filtering surface. Steeper side slopes are likely to have erosion gullying from incoming lateral flows. A maximum slope of 2.5:1 (H:V) is recommended and a 4:1 slope is preferred where space permits.

PRE-TREATMENT

A pea gravel diaphragm located along the top of each bank can be used to provide pretreatment of any runoff entering the swale laterally along its length. Vegetated filter strips or mild side slopes (3:1) also provide pretreatment for any lateral sheet flow entering the swale. Sedimentation forebays at inlets to the swale are also a pretreatment option.

CONVEYANCE AND OVERFLOW

Grass swales must be designed for a maximum velocity of 0.5 m/s or less for the 4 hour 25 mm Chicago storm event. The swale should also convey the locally required design storm (usually the 10 year storm) at non-erosive velocities.

SOIL AMENDMENTS

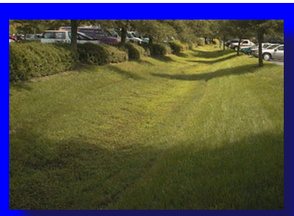
If soils along the location of the swale are highly compacted, or of such low fertility that vegetation cannot become established, they should be tilled to a depth of 300 mm and amended with compost to achieve an organic content of 8 to 15% by weight or 30 to 40% by volume.


Source: Delaware Department of Transportation

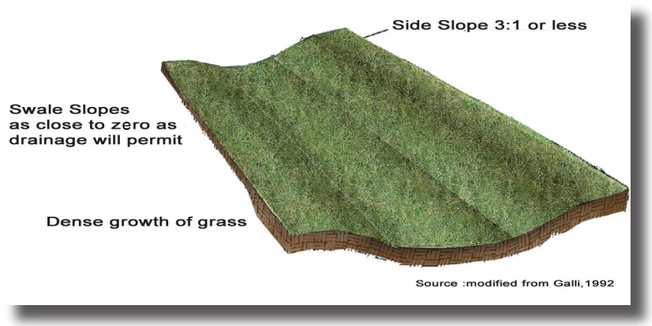
Source: Seattle Public Utilities


Source: Thomas Engineering


Source: Sue Donaldson

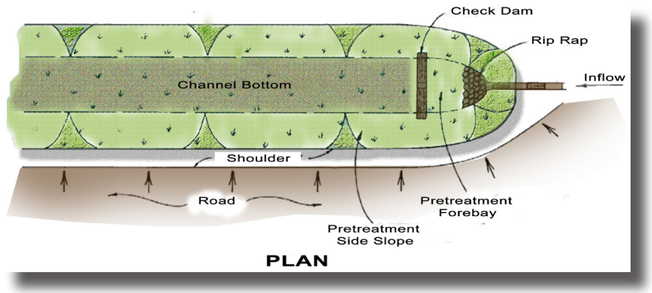


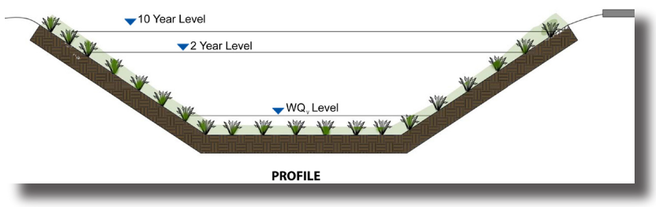

Source: CWP



Source :modified from Galli,1992

PLAN VIEW OF A GRASS SWALE





PLAN AND PROFILE VIEWS

ABILITY TO MEET SWM OBJECTIVES

BMP	Water Balance Benefit	Water Quality Improvement	Stream Channel Erosion Control Benefit
Enhanced Grass Swale	Partial - depends on soil infiltration rate	Yes, if design velocity is 0.5 m/s or less for a 4 hour, 25 mm Chicago storm	Partial - depends on soil infiltration rate

GENERAL SPECIFICATIONS

Component	Specification	Quantity
Check Dams	Constructed of a non-erosive material such as suitably sized aggregate, wood, gabions, riprap, or concrete. All check dams should be underlain with geotextile filter fabric. Wood used for check dams should consist of pressure treated logs or timbers, or water-resistant tree species such as cedar, hemlock, swamp oak or locust.	Spacing should be based on the longitudinal slope and desired ponding volume.
Gravel Diaphragm	Washed stone between 3 and 10 mm in diameter.	Minimum of 300 mm wide and 600 mm deep.

CONSTRUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

Grass swales should be clearly marked before site work begins to avoid disturbance during construction. No vehicular traffic, except that specifically used to construct the facility, should be allowed within the swale site. Any accumulation of sediment that does occur within the swale must be removed during the final stages of grading to achieve the design cross-section. Final grading and planting should not occur until the adjoining areas draining into the swale are stabilized. Flow should not be diverted into the swale until the banks are stabilized.

Preferably, the swale should be planted in the spring so that the vegetation can become established with minimal irrigation. Installation of erosion control matting or blanketing to stabilize soil during establishment of vegetation is highly recommended. If sod is used, it should be placed with staggered ends and secured by rolling the sod. This helps to prevent gullies.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Generally, routine maintenance will be the same as for any other landscaped area; weeding, pruning, and litter removal. Grassed swales should be mown at least twice yearly to maintain grass height between 75 and 150 mm. The lightest possible mowing equipment should be used to prevent soil compaction. Routine roadside ditch maintenance practices such as scraping and re-grading should be avoided. Regular watering may be required during the first two years until vegetation is established. Routine inspection is very important to ensure that dense vegetation cover is maintained and inlets and pretreatment devices are free of debris.

For the first two years following construction the swale should be inspected at least quarterly and after every major storm event (> 25 mm). Subsequently, inspections should be conducted in the spring and fall of each year and after major storm events. Inspect for vegetation density (at least 80% coverage), damage by foot or vehicular traffic, accumulation of debris, trash and sediment, and structural damage to pretreatment devices.

Trash and debris should be removed from pretreatment devices and the surface of the swale at least twice annually. Other maintenance activities include weeding, replacing dead vegetation, repairing eroded areas, dethatching and aerating as needed. Remove accumulated sediment on the swale surface when dry and exceeding 25 mm depth.

SITE CONSIDERATIONS

Available Space
Grass swales usually consume about 5 to 15% of their contributing drainage area. A width of at least 2 metres is needed.

Site Topography
Site topography constrains the application of grass swales. Longitudinal slopes between 0.5 and 6% are allowable. This prevents ponding while providing residence time and preventing erosion. On slopes steeper than 3%, check dams should be used.

Drainage Area & Runoff Volume
The conveyance capacity should match the drainage area. Sheet flow to the grass swale is preferable. If drainage areas are greater than 2 hectares, high discharge through the swale may not allow for filtering and infiltration, and may create erosive conditions. Typical ratios of impervious drainage area to treatment facility area range from 5:1 to 10:1.

Soil
Grass swales can be applied on sites with any type of soils.

Pollution Hot Spot Runoff
To protect groundwater from possible contamination, source areas where land uses or human activities have the potential to generate highly contaminated runoff (e.g., vehicle fueling, servicing and demolition areas, outdoor storage and handling areas for hazardous materials and some heavy industry sites) should not be treated by grass swales.

Proximity to Underground Utilities
Utilities running parallel to the grass swale should be offset from the centerline of the swale. Underground utilities below the bottom of the swale are not a problem.

Water Table
The bottom of the swale should be separated from the seasonally high water table or top of bedrock elevation by at least one (1) metre.

Setback from Buildings
Should be located a minimum of four (4) metres from building foundations to prevent water damage.

Toronto and Region Conservation for The Living City
CVC Credit Valley Conservation

FOR FURTHER DETAILS SEE SECTION 4.8 OF THE CVC/TRCA LID SWM GUIDE