

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. John Muir



TERRABYTE 05.06 – RUNOFF: IT’S THE PITS

In many ways, the sustainable landscape revolution can be described as simply taking a more gentle and thoughtful approach to design and enabling the earth’s natural processes to work their magic without divine gardener intervention.

One of the most important natural processes on earth is the soil’s ability to act as a filter for rainwater as it makes its way back into the ocean and aquifers, “recharging” the groundwater. Unfortunately, we’ve covered most of our landscape with hard, impermeable surfaces that do not permit the rainwater to filter back into the earth, and designed our landscapes to remove water from our properties – roofs have gutters that connect directly with the street, concrete or stone patios and walkways have subsurface drainage, and driveways pitch away from the residence out to a sidewalk (another impermeable surface) and into the street’s storm water system. Most of our landscapes bypass the natural water cleaning process that is so invaluable to the earth’s ability to produce more clean water for our survival.

When water flows from your roof, patio, and driveway into the street, it concentrates the soot and pollution that gathers on these surfaces, eventually depositing them in the nearest water sources and wetlands. Yet, each homeowner has in his/her power one simple act that could dramatically change the effects of urban runoff. Every home could install a water table recharge pit or “infiltration” pit, as it is often called. The pit becomes a sub-surface retention basin filled with large gravel, stackable plastic pallets, or long concave-shaped plastic cylinders to store a certain amount of runoff water for infiltration.

This pit can be located pretty much anywhere on your property (not too close to your or your neighbor’s house), as long as it is in a low spot, or can be dug deep enough to become the low spot. Several great places come to mind for locating your pit. For example, the driveway is a wonderful place for a pit, and so too is any turf-covered play area. Properly structured, the pit could even be placed under a swimming pool or tennis court (you probably want a structural engineer and geologist to work on this one, though). The perfect pit size varies, depending upon the amount of impermeable surface on your property. If the optimal pit is too big for the space you have in mind, then you can consider doing long

