

# S.O.S. Save Our Swales

*By Charles Livio, Horticulturist*

## **What are swales?**

The area immediately adjacent to the paved road surface extending to the right-of-way line or to the edge of the sidewalk is defined as the swale area. In their natural state swales are typically slightly depressed and grassy areas parallel to the roadway.

## **What is their purpose?**

Swales are primarily intended for the drainage of the paved roadway by percolation of the water through the soil. Rainfall becomes stormwater when it can no longer soak into the ground and runs off impervious surfaces. After a heavy rainfall, stormwater runoff from roadways and driveways collects in the swales. The excess water in the swale flows to the stormwater drains, where available, and the remainder of the water slowly percolates through the ground down to the water table. Most of the contaminants, (oil, pesticides and fertilizers) in the stormwater are filtered out by the soil and grass roots by the time it reaches the water table.

When swales are paved over with asphalt or cement, or when additional fill, rocks, elevated sod or plantings are put into the swale, they cease to function as intended. Repeated parking on the swale compacts the soil, thus making the swale less effective in soaking up stormwater and less likely to grow grass. The stormwater runoff from roadways and driveways is now increased with additional impervious areas. The results are increased stormwater runoff into our canals, lakes and rivers and increased urban flooding in our neighborhoods. **Stormwater runoff is one of the primary sources of water pollution in our waterways.**

## **What can you do?**

Here are some guidelines that will protect our environment and your neighborhood.

- **Planting** – planting behind your property line, and not within the swales adds beauty to your front yard and home without disturbing the swale. In areas where tree planting may be allowed in the swale, the resident must first apply for a no fee application from the Cities' Engineering Division. The Engineering Division will review the application to make sure that there is no above ground or below ground utility conflicts or clear vision conflicts at intersections and driveways where the tree(s) is (are) proposed. They may also ask the City Horticulturists to review the proposed tree(s) species to make sure it is the right tree for the width of the swale and its' site characteristics. ( **The right tree for the right place**)

- **Driveways** – A permit is required. You will be required to have a driveway design that drains toward your swale.
- **Paving** – A permit is required to pave any portion of the swale. If you need to pave your swale access to your driveway, pave only the section needed and leave the remainder of the swale in a natural state. If your swale was previously altered, this is the perfect time to bring it back to its natural state.
- **Parking** – To allow healthy grass to develop and to keep the soil from getting too compacted, avoid continual parking of vehicles within swales.
- **Debris** – Maintain your swale free of yard and household debris. Failure to do so can result in a code violation. The only exception is 24 hours before your neighborhood is scheduled for bulk trash pickup.

**Be a part of the solution; be an example in your neighborhood.** Remember, healthy swales reduce urban flooding and reduce polluted runoff from going into our waterways.

**For more information –**

The City of Oakland Park is here to answer your questions and can work with you and your neighborhood associations.

For more information please call: Public Works Operations, 954-630-4430  
Engineering, 954-630-4480  
Parks and Leisure Services, 954-630-4500