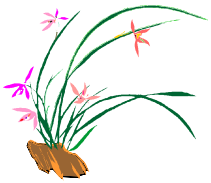
Marion County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

# FILTER STRIPS



**The Marion County Soil & Water Conservation District is a subdivision of state government and is funded primarily by the City of Indianapolis / Marion County government. The District works to assist county residents and others with a host of natural resource issues and concerns. These Conservation Fact Sheets are provided to assist people to better care for the land.**

BACKYARD CONSERVATION
*It'll grow on you.*

## What are Filter Strips?

**Filter strips are areas of permanent vegetation used to intercept sediment, nutrients, and contaminants moving from contaminated areas (such as parking lots or lawns) to bodies of water. They may border small streams and ponds, large lakes and rivers, or wetlands.**

## How to Form a Filter Strip:

- Before beginning any project, check homeowner association covenants, as well as local and county ordinances. Do not work in a drainage, utility, or other easement without the proper permits.
- The slope of the bank will determine how wide your filter strip should be. The steeper the slope, the wider the strip should be to effectively filter and absorb runoff. The area should be at least 20-40 feet wide if possible.
- The simplest way to form a filter strip in an area with existing vegetation is to simply stop mowing, fertilizing, and controlling weeds.
- To increase wildlife habitat and aesthetics, consider planting new plant species in the filter strip area. You can plant a single grass species or a combination of grasses and wildflowers.
  - Fourteen (14) days prior to planting, kill all existing vegetation with an herbicide safe for use around water.
  - Cool season species actively grow in the spring and fall and should be installed between March 1st and May 15th or August 1st and September 15th. Warm season species actively grow in the summer and should be installed between April 1st and June 15th.
  - Once existing vegetation is killed, there are different ways to install the seed. If the area is small, one can till it to a depth of 3 inches and hand-broadcast the seed. The area should then be lightly firmed with a roller and covered with an erosion control blanket. If the area is larger, seed may be installed with a drill.

## Benefits:

- Absorbs nutrient runoff, leading to decreased algae growth and clearer water
- Reduces erosion, promoting better water quality and bank stabilization
- Increases wildlife habitat
- Reduces maintenance and mowing costs


Photo courtesy

## Cool-Season Species:

- Timothy
- Redtop
- Orchardgrass
- Virginia Wildrye
- Canada Wildrye
- White Dutch Clover
- Ladino Clover
- Birdsfoot Trefoil

## Warm-Season Species:

- Big Blue Stem
- Indiangrass
- Fowl Manna Grass
- Little Blue Stem
- Side Oats Gramma
- New England Aster
- Purple Coneflower
- Black Eyed Susan

(These are not complete lists.)

## Operation and Maintenance:

Filter strips should be mowed just enough to encourage dense vegetative growth. However, avoid mowing before August 1st when wildlife are nesting on the ground. Watch for undesirable plant species and be sure to remove them as soon as possible, before they become a problem. Check for and repair gullies and sediment accumulation after a heavy storm to ensure continued functionality of your filter strip.