

Infiltration Test

An infiltration test will help you determine if the soil on your property is suitable for certain types of stormwater management measures, such as a dry well or rain garden. An infiltration test measures how quickly water can soak in and flow through the soil. It is important to know how your soil infiltrates water before building a dry well, rain garden or any other stormwater management structure.

Materials

- 6 inch diameter ring
- Hand sledge and wood block
- Plastic wrap
- 500 mL plastic bottle or graduated cylinder
- Water
- Stopwatch or timer
- Pen and paper

Step 1. Drive Ring into Soil:

- Clear the sampling area of surface residue, etc. If the site is covered with vegetation, trim it as close to the soil surface as possible.
- Using the hand sledge and block of wood, drive the 6 inch diameter ring, beveled edge down, to a depth of three inches (see Figure 1).
- If the soil contains rock fragments, and the ring cannot be inserted to the depth, gently push the ring into the soil until it hits a rock fragment.

Step 2. Firm Soil:

- With the 6 inch diameter ring in place, use your finger to gently firm the soil surface only around the inside edges of the ring to prevent extra seepage. Minimize disturbance to the rest of the soil surface inside the ring.

Step 3. Line Ring with Plastic Wrap:

- Line the soil surface inside the ring with a sheet of plastic wrap to completely cover the soil and ring as shown in Figure 2. This procedure prevents disturbance to the soil surface when adding water.

Step 4. Add Water:

- Fill the plastic bottle or graduated cylinder to the 444 mL (1 inch) mark with water. Pour the 444 mL of water (1 inch of water) into the ring lined with plastic wrap as shown in Figure 2.

Step 5. Remove Wrap and Record Time:

- Remove the plastic wrap by gently pulling it out, leaving the water in the ring (Figure 3). Note the time. Record the amount of time (in minutes) it takes for the 1 inch of water to infiltrate the soil. Stop timing when the surface is just glistening. If the soil surface is uneven inside the ring, count the time until half of the surface is exposed and just glistening. Record the time.

Step 6. Repeat Infiltration Test:

- In the same ring, perform Steps 3, 4, & 5 with a second inch of water. Record the number of minutes elapsed for the second infiltration measurement. Repeat the test (Steps 3, 4, & 5) a few more times. All of the tests should be conducted consecutively. If the test continues to yield the same results, you will have a good idea of the saturated infiltration rate. If the soil infiltrates the water under 1 hour, your soil is ready for a dry well, rain garden or any of the other structural projects in this manual.