Planter Box Maintenance for Homeowners

The planter box on your property is required for stormwater management. Prior to submitting your annual Stormwater Management Facility Operation and Maintenance Inspection Form, use this fact sheet to review your planter box and ensure it is in compliance.

**Planter Box:** A regulated above-ground rain garden, it receives water from a downspout, is planted primarily with native plants, and has an underdrain. The ponding water is soaked up by the plants, or discharged through the underdrain within 48-72 hours following a rain event.

**An “A+” Planter Box**

**This example has:**
- Adequate plant coverage by native plants.
- Energy dissipater (the stones) is below the downspout.
- Correct mulch and ponding depths.
- Grated cover on overflow.

**Common Planter Box Errors**

If you notice these issues, correct them prior to submitting your form.

**Mulch has filled in the ponding area to the top of the planter.**

**Mulch has filled in the ponding area to the top of the overflow.**

**Overmulching.** The ponding depth is eliminated when too much mulch is added. Instead of soaking into the planter’s soil, the water exits through the overflow during small storm events.

**Too few plants or the wrong type of plants.**

Too few plants or the wrong type of plants. 80% plant coverage is required, primarily by native species. The use of seeds to plant the area is not acceptable. The use of annuals and vegetables are also not permitted. Specific, native species are required because they thrive in the planter box environment and provide year-round benefits.
Energy Dissipater—Cobble or splash block prevents incoming water from eroding or damaging nearby plants.

Mulch—An even depth of 2-3 inches of hardwood mulch extends across the entire surface.

Overflow—During large storm events rainwater fills the planter, enters the overflow, then exits through the underdrain. Ensures excessive flows are properly directed, and do not overtop the planter and run along the home’s foundation.

Ponding Depth—Maximum depth of water during a storm event, prior to entering the overflow. Measured from top of overflow to mulch.

Soil Media—A specific sand, soil and organic matter blend. Nutrient-enriched top soil is not permitted.

Structural Soundness—Planter box walls (concrete or wood/liner) must be free of cracks, separation, settling, etc. Buckling walls, deteriorating box materials, tears in liner, and signs of water damage are not acceptable.

Underdrain—Perforated pipe “buried” in the stone layer ensures proper drainage. Carries excess water to the storm drain system or another location on your lot.

Acceptable Plant List:
Virginia DCR 2013 Design Specification No. 9 Bioretention, version 2.0—Table 9.6, Popular Native Plant Materials for Bioretention

Planter Box Design Criteria:
Arlington’s Stormwater Manual: A Guide to Stormwater Requirements for Land Disturbing Activities in Arlington County
Virginia DCR 2013 Design Specification No. 9 Bioretention, version 2.0