

No matter where you live in the watershed, runoff from your property can impact the creek. This brief guide provides suggestions on how you can reduce the harmful effects of runoff.

Q: I don't live close the creek; how can what I do in my front or backyard affect the creek?

A: Runoff from irrigation enters stormdrains that carry the water to the nearest detention pond, creek, or other waterbody. The water is not part of the sewer system so does not go to the wastewater treatment plant. That means whatever pollutants (ant control pesticides, for example) or nutrients (fertilizers) are in the runoff. It can kill aquatic life in the same way it kills the bugs around your house.

The rain that used to be soaked up by the ground where your house and driveway now sits are now covered with hardscape. This means more runoff is created. Multiplied by all the houses and apartments around the city means a lot more water goes into the creek than in the past. This water acts like a pressure washer on the creek bed and bank, damaging sensitive habitat.

Q: What can I do to protect the creeks in my community and the life that depends on it?

A: You and your neighbors can continue to enjoy Laguna Creek by using creek-friendly landscaping and gardening practices. Here are some suggestions:

- Landscape with native plant species.

Native riparian vegetation is uniquely adapted to survive flood conditions. Native plants provide erosion protection during high flows and generally recover quickly when flood waters subside. Native species also require less water and fewer chemicals than most exotic plants.

- Encourage infiltration

Pave only where necessary. Paved surfaces increase runoff during storms and peak flows in creeks, adding to flooding and erosion problems.

- Use pervious pavements

If you are planning to construct walkways, patios, driveways, or stormwater drains, consider alternatives such as gravel, paving blocks/stones, or bark that maximize permeable surface area. This allows more rainwater to soak into the ground on site.

- Practice water conservation

Every drop of water you save, whether through landscaping with drought-tolerant plants, reducing personal consumption, installing drip irrigation, and avoiding other water-using activities, contributes to maintaining a healthy creek environment.

- Limit use of gardening chemicals. Avoid using chemicals entirely in wet weather.

Pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers can run off into the creek. Fertilizers add excess nutrients to natural waters that lead to algae bloom, bad odors, and even fish kills.

- Consider using compost and organic soil amendments instead of chemical fertilizers.

Pull weeds before they flower to reduce the need for herbicides. Introduce natural predators such as toads, spiders, garter snakes, and ladybugs, which reduce insect pests.

- Dispose of yard and lawn clippings properly. Never dispose of lawn clippings in a creek.

Soil and lawn clippings disposed in creeks become unsightly, destroy aquatic habitats, and may also worsen flooding problems. While they are biodegradable, organic wastes use the oxygen that fish, aquatic insects, and native plants need for survival.

- Leave the lawn clippings and leaves where they fall. Use the mulching setting on your lawnmower, which chops up grass into small bits. They will decompose in place, adding nutrients to the soil. In the fall, you can mow the leaves as well. By breaking them up into small pieces, they will decompose over the winter, again adding nutrients and mineral sback into the soil.

Additional resources:

River Friendly Landscaping Guide, a booklet from the Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership: <http://www.beriverfriendly.net/#//>

River Friendly Landscaping website, developed by Ecolandscape California. Full of valuable information about plants, irrigation design, and garden planning.
<http://www.ecolandscape.org/riverfriendly/>