

# Contour Your Garden in Eight Easy Steps

**1. Make Your Site Plan** and note where rain falls and flows. Look for an open, mostly flat low spot to direct water towards in the front yard, or anywhere with the center at least 10' away from the house foundation and 3' away from the sidewalk and neighbors (see pp. 14-15).

**2. Lay Out Your Low Spots.** Spread out a garden hose to outline the shape. The area must be basically flat or slightly bowl-like, and not sloping back toward the house. Be careful around trees. Don't put your contours under a mature tree or disturb any big roots. Remove all plants (including grass) from the area and start digging.

**Do not dig without calling 8-1-1- DIG ALERT!**

**3. Do A Percolation Test.** If you have compaction, try to break through it with a shovel or a pitchfork (see p. 9).

**4. Dig A Basin** that is between 6" and 12" deep at the center. Slope the sides gently to make a sloping bowl, not a cylinder. **For every 1,000 sq. ft. of roof area, plan on creating a basin covering 150 sq. ft., and six inches deep** (see p. 15).

**5. Mound Extra Soil** around the bowl to increase capacity. At the bottom of the basin, put down at least an inch of high quality compost or worm castings to activate your soil.

**6. Direct Downspouts Into The Basin** area, moving the rainwater through gravel lined ditches or aboveground drainage pipes. Also, make an overflow path so extra water has a direct channel away from your house (see p. 15).

**7. Plan For Overflow** that isn't directed onto your neighbor's property; overflow always should be directed from your property into the street (see p. 15).

**8. The Basin Will Fill Up** when it rains, creating a temporary pond until the water soaks into your soil. All the water should be gone in 24 hours.

**TAKE ACTION if your basin is slow draining!**

If water in your basin is not gone within 48 to 72 hours maximum, then auger the basin to eliminate compaction (see p. 25). Add worm castings when it has drained. Whenever you disturb the soil, be sure to reapply compost.

# Contours capture rain

## Native Plants OK With Wet Feet (Basin Swale Plants)



1 *Anemopsis californica*  
Yerba Mansa



2 *Juncus patens*  
California Wiregrass



3 *Clinopodium douglasii*  
Yerba Buena

**Swale Plants Are Special.** These basin plants like wet feet and can be completely submerged in rain water and still survive Los Angeles' hot dry summers without extra water. They're sort of plant Super Heroes that way!

## Native Plants That Prefer Dry Feet (Berm Plants)



1 *Epilobium canum*  
'Everett's Choice'  
Everett's California  
Fuchsia



2 *Salvia leucophylla*  
'Point Sal Spreader'  
Point Sal Purple Sage



3 *Bouteloua gracilis*  
'Blonde Ambition'  
Blonde Ambition Blue  
Grama

**Berm Plants Like It Dry.** On the mounded side berms, choose plants that like their feet drier. Plants from the chaparral community are great choices here. Throughout the entire landscape, make sure to mulch at least 3" deep around all the plants (though not right up against the trunks), including those in the bottom of the swale.

© G3, Alex Stevens, 2019

