



The health of an urban watershed is threatened as development happens. Bit by bit, streams get paved over, pollutants increase, and trees are cut down. Without special care, habitats for birds, animals and fish decline until they vanish. While this too often happens, it doesn't have to be this way. Life will return to even the most desolate spots given the right conditions.

### Home Tips for Healthy Watersheds

1. **Dispose of all petroleum products and chemicals at recycling facilities** – this removes pollutants that run off private property and contaminate nearby creeks.
2. **Dispose of yard and lawn cuttings using curbside pick up, the landfill or compost them** – this reduces the spread of non-native plants, and keeps garden waste out of streams.
3. **Plant native trees and vegetation** – this provides cover and nutrients to fish and other creatures, stabilizes stream banks, reduces erosion and uses less water.
4. **Minimize paving and use gravel or permeable pavers instead** – this allows water to soak into the ground and slowly move to nearby waterways, thus maintaining summer flows and reducing flooding in rainy months.
5. **Keep creeks natural** – meandering creeks with deep pools, fallen trees and branches reduce erosion and provide improved fish habitat.
6. **Maintain septic systems** – this reduces pollution going into the watershed.
7. **Support and encourage your local government to protect and restore watersheds** – they can be a major force for watershed health.

### Urban Watershed Challenges

1. **Grassy or bare stream banks** – are subject to erosion and provide no shade or protection for fish, or living space for plants and animals.
2. **Paved surfaces and loss of vegetation** – create flashy water runoff that causes erosion and delivers pollutants to streams.
3. **Disposal of pollutants into storm drains, perimeter drains or septic systems** – results in contamination of streams and death of aquatic life.
4. **Channeled, straight waterways without natural structures** – result in erosion, as well as providing little to no aquatic habitat, flooding and downstream silting.
5. **Invasive plants** – can change habitats, out-compete and overwhelm other species that are part of a healthy watershed (FMI beplantwise.ca).
6. **Use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers and weed killers on lawns and gardens** – results in chemicals and excessive nutrients being flushed into the watershed.
7. **Concrete or rip-rap stream banks** – eliminate habitat and displace flow creating downstream erosion.

# Think Like A Watershed

COMOX VALLEY GUIDE TO URBAN WATERSHEDS

## WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is an area of land that collects water and funnels it to a downstream waterway, such as a larger river, lake, estuary or ocean. Watersheds are separated from each other by hills, mountains, or other elevation features. The water moving through a watershed includes rain water and snowmelt as well as ground water.

A healthy watershed provides and conserves clean water, and provides habitat for fish, wildlife, and native plants.

Watersheds in urban areas face special challenges, as the land becomes covered with buildings, roads and pavement. Water runs quickly off the land instead of soaking in, and pollution is washed into streams.

**We all live in and depend on watersheds.**

**We all can play a role in keeping them healthy**