

Low impact development practices terms and definitions developed by Regional language bank partners 2010

Those working in the field of low impact development often use different terms for similar technologies and facilities. Those engaged in outreach find the public to be confused over what these technologies and facilities are, how they look and how they perform. Many government agencies and non-profit groups provide outreach and education to the public on low impact development in attempt to build support for policies and to encourage the public to use these practices more. These groups have found a lack of consistent terminology a stumbling block in communicating and building support. Metro convened a group of partners working in providing outreach and education to the public on low impact development with the goal of developing a shared bank of terms and definitions. This group included representatives of several government agencies and non-profits. The group developed a list of 22 terms and definitions related to low impact development that can be used consistently throughout the region. The group also conducted a focus group to test the understanding of the wording, along with pictures, on citizens.

Now that the terminology and definitions are completed, the group will continue to meet to support each other in developing interpretive signs and other forms of public outreach on low impact development.

1. low impact development - Methods that preserve natural resources and collect and clean stormwater runoff on site to protect and improve water quality.
2. compost - Decomposed organic material added to soil that increases its capacity to hold water and nourish plants.
3. native plants - Plants that need little or no fertilizer or care once established, provide wildlife habitat, and occur historically in an area.
4. drought tolerant - Plants that need little or no watering once established.
5. invasive plants - Aggressive plants that crowd out native plants for water, sunlight and nutrients and harm the environment, economy and human health.
6. green roof (ecorooft-City of Portland) - Vegetated roof system that reduces runoff, improves air quality, provides wildlife habitat, saves energy and lasts longer than a conventional roof.
7. swale - Long, planted, open channel that carries, slows and absorbs stormwater and filters out pollutants.
8. rain garden - Planted, bowl-shaped area designed to collect and absorb runoff and filter out pollutants.
9. green street - Street designed to capture, absorb and filter runoff using rain gardens, planters, swales, porous pavement, tree canopy and other methods.

10. porous pavement - Surface to walk, drive or park on that reduces stormwater runoff by allowing water to soak into the ground. Examples are permeable pavers, pervious concrete, porous asphalt and gravel.
11. stormwater runoff - Rainfall and snowmelt that “runs off” instead of seeping into the ground. Runoff carries pollutants to waterways and may degrade streams and cause unnatural flooding.
12. mulch - Material such as bark chunks, wood chips, and stone that is spread on soil to retain moisture, discourage weeds and protect against erosion.
13. rainwater harvesting (rain barrel) - To collect and store rainwater for landscape watering, toilet flushing and other uses.
14. tree preservation, planting and protection - To preserve and protect trees by fencing, limiting soil compaction, guarding from animal damage and other practices. Trees capture rain, filter pollutants, provide shade and cool air, improve air quality and provide habitat.
15. downspout disconnection - To disconnect a building's roof drains from the storm sewer system and re-direct to lawns, rain gardens and swales. Always check with local codes before disconnecting downspouts.
16. stormwater planter - Structural container with soil and plants built to collect and slow runoff; it may have a drain for excess water.
17. sustainable (low impact) site design - Building and construction techniques that lessen the impact on the environment and protect and preserve open spaces, natural resources and habitat.
18. minimize hard surfaces - To reduce the area covered by buildings, roofs, roads, parking lots and sidewalks
19. water-wise gardening (xeriscaping) - To minimize water use by choosing plants appropriate to the site that need little watering.
20. naturescaping - Landscaping with native plants to restore natural systems and attract native insects, birds and wildlife.
21. watershed - Land that drains water to a stream, river, pond, lake or ocean.
22. impervious surface - Hard surfaces such as roofs and pavement that prohibit water from soaking into the ground.