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Controlling and Preventing Erosion

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Is it time to spruce up the landscape and grounds? This can be a big task with many details to keep track of depending on your plans. One detail that can be easily overlooked is controlling soil erosion, which may seem like a minor item, but eroded soil is a major pollutant when it enters our waterways by carrying toxic compounds and increasing turbidity. This may result in smothering aquatic plants, reducing light penetration through the water, and clogging fish gills. There are practices that you can do to help prevent these things from happening by keeping soil on your property.

If a large area of land is going to be bare for a while, install a silt fence around it. This is a woven synthetic fabric fence that is supported by metal or wood posts and traps soil on site. In order for the fence to work properly, it must be installed within 24 hours of construction and buried at least eight inches deep in a trench without any gaps. Monthly inspections need to be done to ensure integrity. However, the fence should be inspected before and after any storms. When gaps or tears are found, fix them immediately. Also, soil that has accumulated along the fence to over one-half of its height should be removed. This inspection and maintenance routine should be continued until ground cover has been established to stabilize the soil.

If a slit fence is too extensive for your project, there are other smaller scale erosion control methods. If piles of soil will be on the property, place them away from downslope areas, driveways, streams, lakes, and any other place where the soil can be easily washed away. The soil should be covered with a plastic sheet when not being used, but lightly wet it when the soil is exposed to keep dust down. Storm drains should be protected by placing hay bales, filter socks, or other containment objects around them. These items trap sediments like a slit fence but on a smaller scale, so regular inspection and maintenance ought to be done.

Once your project is complete, bare soil areas need to be covered. This can be done in many different ways. One approach is to apply a combination of seed and straw to establish permanent ground cover. After choosing the correct type of seed for the season and site, apply it according to the label directions. Then cover the seed with one-fourth inch of soil followed by anchored straw. Finally, water the area every two days until the grass is at least two inches tall. Another way to create permanent cover is to apply sod. To keep weeds from popping up, use sod that has been certified by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Division of Plant Industries as “noxious weed free.” After laying the sod, apply enough water to wet the top six inches of soil. Then water lightly every day to keep the soil moist until the grass becomes established. If you do not want permanent ground cover, such as in a plant bed, put mulch there. Many different types of mulch are available like melaleuca, pine bark, and eucalyptus. These mulches should be two to three inches deep. After applying the mulch of your choice, monitor it occasionally looking for decomposition, and add more where it is needed.

I encourage you to take this extra step during your landscape project. By making an effort to keep the soil on site, you are helping to preserve our natural water resources.