



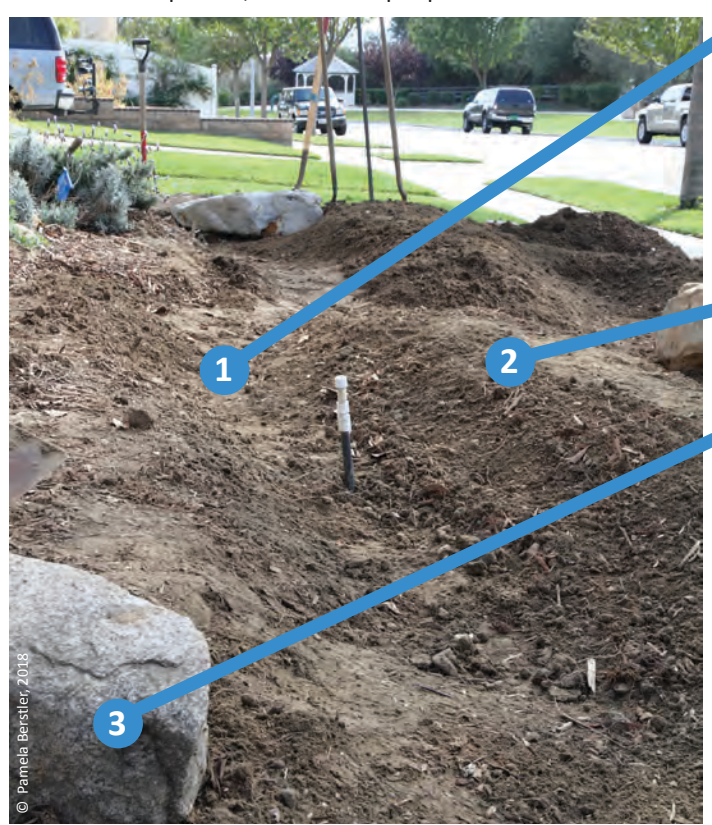
© Paul Herzog, 2018

# Contours for Rain Capture

## Every garden can become a **Sponge**.

Many front yards are just flat lawn, but this space could be a last chance to capture and filter your seasonal rain before it runs into the storm drain and right into creeks, rivers and eventually, the ocean! By contouring the land to hold on to at least the first inch of rain after a dry period (known as First Flush), we create landscapes that are far more interesting than flat expanses of lawn, and provide an opportunity to create conditions for some of California's most interesting native plants.

Meet your **Contour** (aka Swale!) Sounds fancy, but really, it's very simple. Your Contour is just a little soil basin to slow, spread, and sink the first inch of rain water from your roof into the plants in your front yard (*see pp. 28-29*). Direct your downspouts into the depression. Your soil and plants will thank you! There are two main components of this watershed wise landscape: **Basins & Berms**. **Boulders** are optional, and a lot of people like the look of them. If you don't like the rock, skip them and just add mulch.



© Pamela Berstler, 2018

**Basins and Swales** are shallow depressions, or channels no more than 6"-24" deep, on gently sloped or nearly flat landscapes that move water around over short distances. The plants in and around the depressions capture and sink small volumes of surface water. Small, shallow depressions (6" - 12") are best used in clay soil areas, while sandy soils may accommodate the deeper (up to 24") depressions. Channels can be filled with mulch, planted (vegetated swales), and/or lined with rocks and small boulders to resemble natural water features.

**Berms** are mounds of raised soil, usually planted, that can border basins and swales or be used alone. Berms help contain and move water around, increasing the holding capacity of basins and swales, and providing good drainage for certain plants.

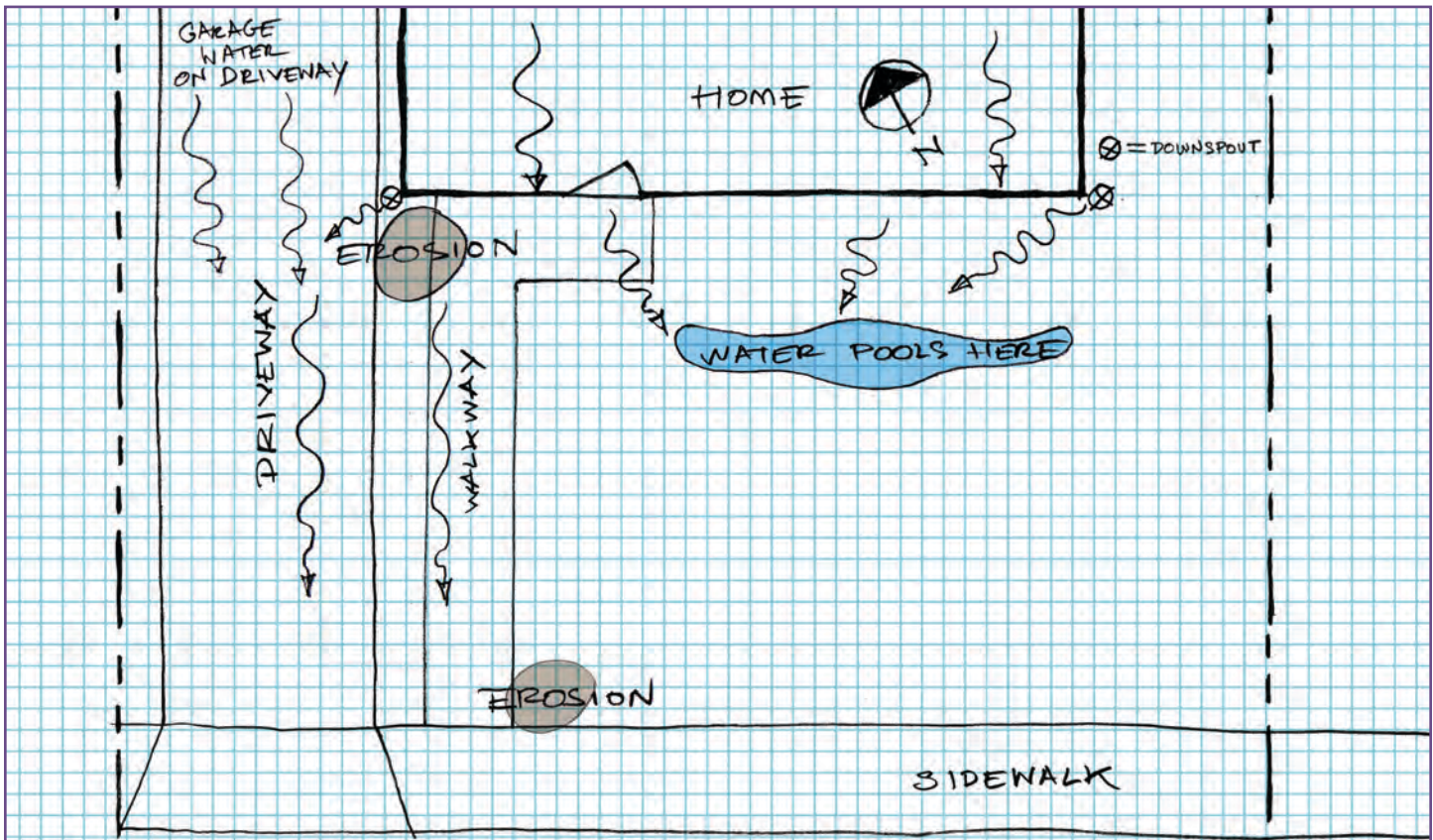
**Boulders** may be used to retain small berms or edges of swales and to create "dry creekbed" interest in the landscape.



© Paul Herzog, 2018



# Imagine your yard is a **Mini-Watershed**



© G3, Alex Stevens, 2018

## Your **Roof** is the **TOP** of the Watershed.

### Make a Copy of Your Site Plan and Label It "Water Plan"

Watch what happens to water as it comes off the roof of your home and moves across your property. Your roof is the **Top** of your mini-watershed and where the water finally runs off your property is the **Bottom**. Think about how you can capture water in between the top and bottom of your landscape.

Begin to separate out each area that deposits water into a downspout. Mark the location of each of your roof gutters and downspouts.

Once you know the total area of the roof, you can figure out the amount of rainfall that it generates (*see p. 44*).

- Do you have low spots in which water pools?
- Does water run off the property anywhere?
- Does water run onto the property from a neighbor or street?
- Do any buildings or any hard surfaces appear to be water damaged or eroded? If so, does it appear to be a result of rain, irrigation, or both?
- Note the direction of water as it moves around the property.
- Turn on the irrigation for no more than 5 minutes and note whether there is pooling or runoff (*see p.51*).
- What parts of the roof divert water into downspouts, and is the water being diverted into your landscape? Indicate the direction of the water with arrows as seen above.

