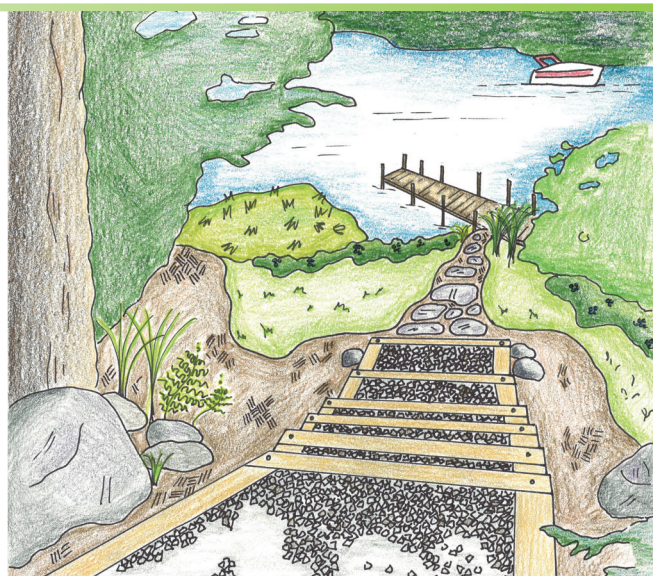


# INFILTRATION STEPS

Infiltration steps slow down and infiltrate runoff on moderate slopes to reduce erosion and define walking paths. They are well-suited for shoreline properties.



## SIZING AND DESIGN

**STEP 1. Measure the slope.** Measure the overall rise and run of the area in inches (Figure 1).

**STEP 2. Determine the number of steps needed.** Divide the rise of the slope (measured in Step 1) by the height of the timber (6" unless you are using different sized timbers) and round to the nearest whole number. This is the number of steps you will need.

$$\text{RISE} \div \text{TIMBER HEIGHT} = \text{NUMBER OF STEPS}$$

**STEP 3. Determine step depth (tread).** Divide the run of the slope by the number of steps (figured in Step 2). The depth of the step tread is flexible, but should be at least 15" to be comfortable to walk up and down.

$$\text{RUN} \div \text{NUMBER OF STEPS} = \text{DEPTH OF STEP TREAD}$$

**STEP 4. Determine the width of the steps.** A comfortable width is usually 4 feet, but depending on the topography, trees, or other site conditions, a wider or narrower step may be desired.

**STEP 5. Determine materials needed.** Once you know the number of steps that you need, their width and tread depth, you can determine the length of timber and the amount of steel rebar that you will need.

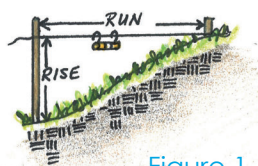


Figure 1

### EQUIPMENT & MATERIALS

- ↳ Measuring tape
- ↳ Shovel
- ↳ Sledge hammer
- ↳ 4 Wooden stakes
- ↳ String or spray paint
- ↳  $\frac{3}{4}$ " crushed stone or pea stone
- ↳ Non-woven geotextile fabric
- ↳ 6" x 6" pressure treated timbers (or similar sized material such as granite or logs)
- ↳ 18" long pieces of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter steel rebar
- ↳ Level
- ↳ Power drill with  $\frac{1}{2}$ " drill bit
- ↳ 12" galvanized spikes

**Timbers:** If you are using side timbers, add the length of each side timber (the tread depth) to the step width to get the total length of timber you'll need per step. As a guide, use the following equations to estimate the length (in feet) of timber material you will need:

$$\text{STEP WIDTH} + (2 \times \text{TREAD DEPTH}) = \text{TIMBER LENGTH PER STEP}$$

$$\text{TIMBER LENGTH PER STEP} \times \text{NUMBER OF STEPS} = \text{TOTAL TIMBER LENGTH}$$

**Rebar:** If you two-piece any of the side timbers together, plan to install rebar at each end of the timber where the pieces join.

**STEPS:** Two 18" lengths of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter steel rebar for each step.

**SIDE TIMBERS (if using):** Six 18" lengths of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter steel rebar for each step.

**Landscape Fabric:** Multiply the number of steps by the square footage of each step to estimate the total square footage of fabric needed.

For example: 4 steps X 4' width X 1.5' tread = 24 ft<sup>2</sup> of landscape fabric needed.

**Crushed Stone or Pea Stone:** Multiply the number of steps to be back-filled by the volume of step. Calculate the volume for each step by multiplying the step's width, tread, and depth.

For example: 4 steps X 4' width X 1.5' tread X 0.5' deep = 12 cubic feet of stone are needed. You can convert cubic feet to cubic yards by multiplying by 0.037.

*TIP: Side timbers may not be needed if the steps are in a pathway where the surrounding land is higher. In this case, extend the timbers into the adjacent banks so water will not go around the steps.*

## INSTALLATION

**STEP 1. Stake perimeter.** Stake out the perimeter of the stairway by driving a stake into the ground at each corner of the stairway and stretching string between them (Figure 2).

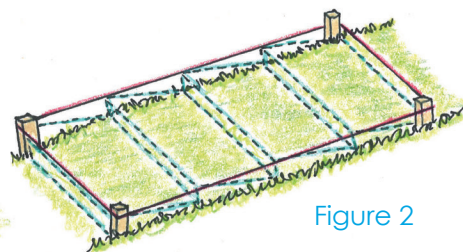


Figure 2

**STEP 2. Mark areas to be excavated.** Determine the areas that need to be excavated for each step. Using a measuring tape and starting from the string at the bottom of the slope, measure and mark the depth of the each step until you reach the string at the top of the slope. Use spray paint, sand, or flour to mark the depth of each step (Figure 2).

**STEP 3. Excavate first step.** Starting at the bottom, dig a trench for the first riser timber (this will be more like a shallow groove in the ground). Next, if using side timbers, dig trenches for the side timbers, which should be long enough to extend 6" past the next step's riser. Check to make sure the trenches are level (Figure 3).

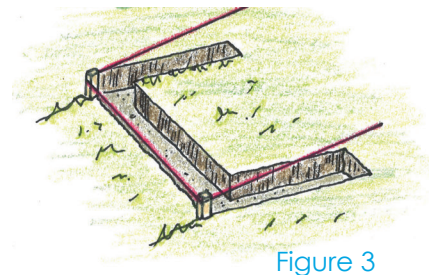


Figure 3

**STEP 4. Prepare materials.** Cut the timbers to the appropriate length. For each step, cut one riser timber as long as the step width and 2 timbers as long as the step depth for the side timbers (remember that each step should extend 6" past the next step's riser.) Drill  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter holes approximately 6" from the ends of each timber (Figure 4).

**STEP 5. Position timbers.** Position the timbers in the step and remove or add soil as needed to level them (Figure 4).

**STEP 6. Anchor timbers.** Drive the steel rebar through the drilled holes on the end of each timber and into the ground. Make sure the rebar is level with the timber surface or slightly recessed since the edges may be sharp (Figure 4).

**STEP 7. Dig and level inside step.** Shovel out the soil inside the step to create a surface roughly level with the bottom of the timbers. Additional soil can be removed to provide more area for infiltration if desired. Make sure to dispose of excavated soil in a place where it will not wash away (Figure 4).

**STEP 8. Build second step.** To build the next step, measure from the front of the first riser timber and mark the tread depth on the side timbers with a pencil. Align the front of the second step riser timber with the pencil lines on the side timbers of the step below. Secure the riser timber to the side timbers using 12" galvanized spikes (Figure 5). To make it easier to drive the galvanized spikes into the timber, you can pre-drill holes to about 5" deep.

**STEP 9. Excavate side timbers.** Set and anchor side timbers by driving the steel rebar through the drilled holes on the end of each timber into the ground (Figure 5).

**STEP 10. Dig and level inside step.** Shovel out the soil inside the step to create a surface roughly level with the bottom of the timbers the same as in Step 7.

**STEP 11. Repeat.** Repeat Steps 8 through 10 for each remaining step. When installing the top step, cut the side timbers 6" shorter than the ones on the lower steps - these timbers do not need the extra length since no stairs will rest on them.

**STEP 12. Fabric and backfill.** Lay down landscape fabric and backfill with stone.

- Line the area inside each set of timbers with non-woven geotextile fabric. Make sure the fabric is long enough to extend a few inches up the sides of the timbers.
- Fill each step with  $\frac{3}{4}$ " crushed stone or pea stone until it is about 1" below the top of the timber (Figure 6).
- Seed and/or mulch bare soil adjacent to the steps.

*TIP: Most lumber supply stores have a cutting station to cut timbers to the correct length if you do not have a saw.*

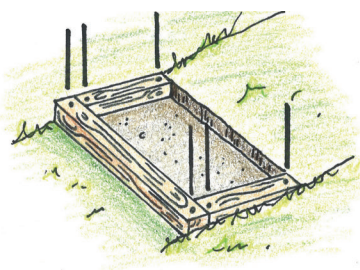


Figure 4

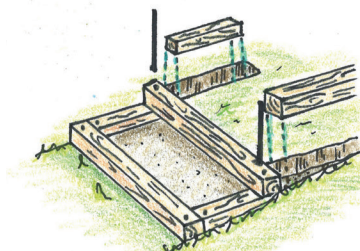


Figure 5

*TIP: Place the galvanized spikes where they will not interfere with the rebar.*

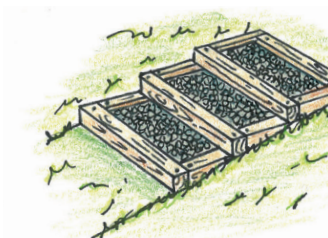


Figure 6



## TO RETROFIT EXISTING STEPS

Existing steps can be retrofitted to improve infiltration by removing the current material and filling in according to Step 12. TIP: If the timbers are not firmly secured, drill  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter holes six inches from the ends of each timber. Drive  $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, 18" long steel rebar through the holes with a sledge hammer. For gentle slopes, wooden stakes or large rocks can also secure the timbers.

## MAINTENANCE

**INSPECT:** Seasonally and after large storms, look for signs of erosion or clogging such as ponding at the surface or accumulated sediment.

**CLEAN OUT:** If clogging occurs, remove and wash or replace stone and fabric. Remove any vegetation growing on the steps if not included in the design.

**REPLACE:** Replace timbers if damaged or rotted, as needed.



Native shrubs, perennials, grasses, and groundcover enhance the function of these infiltration steps to provide multiple ecological benefits.

## DESIGN REFERENCE

Maine Department of Environmental Protection. [\*Conservation Practices for Homeowners\*](#). Fact Sheet Series. May 2006.

Figures adapted with permission from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection.