

Want revenge on Ida? Cut Your Lawn on a Need-To-Mow Basis

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Ida was, let's say, *rude*, crashing in on us like that in September. She trashed our basements and busted our bridges and fences and flooded our yards and roads and creeks. We were, thankfully, spared some of the horrors she inflicted on our neighboring communities. But Ida's dark rampage did shine a bright light on something we may not think about much: storm water management. Generally, it's the Township that concerns itself with issues like flooding and water runoff, and it does a very fine job, too. But watching Ida send torrents of water flowing through our private yards and into our streets and creeks made it clear that we all have a part to play in storm water management. For some of us, that part might be as simple as changing the way we manage our lawns.

Left to its own devices, nature does a pretty decent job of taking the edge off even the most obnoxious storms. Forests and meadows deal with a deluge by slowing water runoff, allowing more of it to filter into the soil, where it is absorbed or cleaned before what's left hits our waterways. Lawns – like the ones many of us have around our homes - are more likely to direct water than drink it. Their low height means they don't slow much. Their shallow roots mean they don't absorb much. And their insatiable need to be mowed compacts the ground beneath, making it even easier for storm water to swim by rather than sink in. The result: increased flooding.

But we can do something about that, something as simple as adopting more of a need-to-mow policy. Just letting your grass grow a little higher will slow water runoff and reduce flooding. You can raise the blades on your mower. Or mow less often. Better yet, reduce your mowing footprint altogether by turning some of that lawn back to Mother Nature. That low point out back, the one that becomes a water feature after every storm, might be the ideal location for a rain garden. Or consider adding planted or wooded areas to your property. Trees and shrubs have deep roots. They not only drink in more water than your lazy turf, their broad leaves catch raindrops before they even hit the ground. Adding natural spaces will make your property more beautiful, more valuable, and definitely more flood resistant. Plus, environmentally speaking, lawn mowers are a disaster. Using them less not only saves you time and money, it helps reduce emissions, decrease fossil fuel use, increase biodiversity and water quality, improve soil health, and slow climate change. Making mega storms less likely. And less virulent.

Take that, Ida.

For more information, see <http://dcnr.pa.gov> and <http://dep.pa.gov>