

COLUMN FOR APRIL 16TH 2005.

HEADLINE; EVALUATING YOUR HOUSE DRAINAGE

Q; Last year my neighbour had a little water in his basement and the contractor told him to raise his soil around the home, it appears to have helped this year. Can this help around my home and if I did this it would be above a couple of my cellar windows, any suggestions?

A: Correct drainage around any home is important, it will assist in keeping your basement or crawl space drier. The majority of homes that I see with water issues in the basement can often be traced back to three things, improper discharge of eve trough downspouts, and negative grade of the soil to the home and containment of water in the landscaping. There are other issues, water table, foundation deterioration, extremes in climatic conditions and changes in ground water discharge from outlying areas that can cause water issues in basements. There is also a long list of rare conditions but we will stick with the common conditions. Your neighbour's contractor was honest, he advised on a simple solution that often works. At this time of year I suggest that you take a walk around your home and take along an eight foot piece of wood, a straight piece of 2x2 will work and a two foot long level. Everywhere you feel that the soil against the home is either level or sloping towards the home, set the wood on the ground with one end up against the home. Now set the level on it and raise the wood up until you are just over half a bubble out of level. This is a quick scale to evaluate the amount of grade improvements that are needed around your home. If you find there is over 2 inches of soil needed, then tamping or compacting is necessary. I often see fresh soil around a home that gives the appearance of correct grade, however after the first good rain the real height is considerably lower. If you have good grass, try and take it up in sections like sod, a flat wide spade works well here. Cut the grass in 2-foot squares and try to get under the grass by a couple of inches. If your grass is poor, then layering soil right overtop can be done. Some homes are closely spaced, the recommended minimum distance for grades is six feet but this is not always possible and in most municipalities you are not permitted to discharge your ground water on your neighbours lot. Check your eve trough and downspouts, again the six-foot rule for discharge works here if possible. If your home is close to your neighbour try a flex extension or a section of solid big "O" pipe and look for the natural drainage. Sometimes there is a drainage ditch or swale as it is called between houses. If you lack the correct distance, look to see if a swale is present. Newer homes often have grade certificates and this usually means that these gentle ditches are present.

Decorative landscaping can enhance the curb appeal of your home. I commonly see the black plastic edging or decorative stones forming a raised edge against the flowerbeds and the lawns. This can create a miniature pond against your home. Either raise the soil in the flowerbeds or grade the soil so it drains to an opening in the decorative stones or plastic edging.

If you have a situation where correcting your grades comes in conflict with your basement windows, then the installation of a window well is necessary. Some planning is necessary and the drawing will help here. Take the time to dig down below the window, a minimum of 18 inches. Rent a posthole digger and in the centre of the window well dig your hole. Using the height of your basement and the bottom of the window, estimate the distance from the bottom of the window well to the footing. This should give you a rough idea how deep you will have to dig. You should hit drainage stone above the drainage pipe that should be surrounding your home, stop when you hit it. Now purchase

your window well, the correct length of big “O” pipe and some washed gravel. Inset the pipe and fill with gravel, use the balance of the gravel to fill the window well, stop about 6 inches from the bottom of the window. Proper grades and management of discharge water around a home are important for the long-term integrity of your foundation, as the old saying goes “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”

Now the answer to last week’s question. What is a shoe mould? The answer was A) a moulding strip placed against the baseboard at the floor. Now this week’s question. What is tuck-pointing? Is it A) a corner joint in decorative plaster. B) A method of finishing concrete on older stone foundations. C) A method of filling mortar joints to provide a tooled joint. The answer in next week’s column.

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