

Standing water in the yard is not just an annoyance. It kills grass, attracts mosquitoes, undermines foundations, and turns a backyard into unusable mud after a single storm. Homeowners who call a backyard drainage contractor often want to know two things: how long the work will take, and what each stage looks like. Below I walk through realistic timelines, what happens during each stage, how choices affect cost and duration, and common surprises that add days to a project. This is based on years of fieldwork with yard drainage services and managing installations ranging from small backyard french drain installation jobs to full stormwater projects.

Why accurate expectations matter A project that runs longer than expected disrupts landscaping plans, outdoor events, and access to parts of the yard. Contractors who offer fixed timelines without site visits are usually guessing. The better the pre-site assessment, the tighter the schedule estimate. When a homeowner understands the stages and likely delays, they make better trade-offs — for example choosing temporary turf protection instead of expensive irrigation relocation.

Overview of the typical timeline A straightforward backyard drainage installation for a single problem area often completes in two to four days of on-site work. More complex projects that require permits, regrading, retaining wall adjustments, or new outlet connections can extend from one to three weeks, sometimes longer if municipal approvals are involved. A rough rule of thumb I use in proposals is: simple repairs and french drains under 100 linear feet, expect 2 to 4 days; medium jobs with regrading, more than one outlet, or hardscape work, expect 5 to 10 days; larger or permitting jobs, expect 2 to 3 weeks or more.

Stage 1: initial assessment and scope (1 to 3 days, sometimes same day) The first visit is diagnostic. A backyard water drainage solutions specialist walks the yard, looks at past trouble spots, inspects downspouts, and checks the slope from house to street. I measure low spots and note where runoff concentrates. If water is sinking slowly into the soil, surface drainage solutions might suffice. If water sits after a week of dry weather, sub-surface solutions are required.

Key questions during assessment: is the problem surface pooling, groundwater, or stormwater backing from a clogged outlet; is the soil clay-heavy or sandy; is there an established route to discharge water legally; are there nearby utility lines; will the existing grading direct water toward structures. A single visit rarely yields a contract; I often take notes, photos, and a quick sketch, then return with options and cost ranges within 24 to 72 hours.

Stage 2: design and choosing a solution (1 to 7 days) Once the problem is understood, the design phase chooses a solution: surface swales and regrading, yard grading for drainage, a French drain, a catch basin and pipe network, or a combination. Each has trade-offs.

A French drain is great when water collects along a foundation or in a long low strip. It requires trenching, perforated pipe, and gravel. Expect less visual disruption once plants regrow, but initial digging can be significant. Surface solutions like swales and regrading are less expensive and faster, but they require sufficient slope and a legal outlet. Sub-surface drainage that ties into stormwater systems or dry wells handles large runoff volumes but needs permission and sometimes municipal review.

This design step includes pipe sizing, outlet location, and a materials list. If a homeowner wants to reuse landscaping features or preserve mature trees, the design can take longer to coordinate. For yard drainage services with a tight schedule, I prioritize options that minimize heavy equipment near roots, or propose hand-excavation for sensitive zones.

Permits and approvals (if required) add time Not every project needs a permit, but many that connect to public storm drains, alter flow onto neighboring property, or install large dry wells do. Permit timelines vary by jurisdiction. In some towns a permit can be issued in a couple of days; in others the review can take two to four weeks. If you need a permit, factor that into the schedule before excavation starts. I tell clients to expect the permit timeframe to be the single largest variable they cannot control.

Stage 3: mobilization and site prep (half day to 1 day) Mobilization is when the crew, machines, and materials get to the site. For small jobs this can be a truck with a mini-excavator and gravel; for larger jobs it might include a backhoe, dump truck, and compacting equipment. Preparing the site includes marking utilities with the local dig safe service, protecting turf and plantings, and laying down access mats to protect driveways.

If the yard needs temporary water diversion or the house foundation is close to the work, I install sediment barriers and run temporary pumps. Mobilization is quick if materials are staged ahead of time. Unexpected delays at this stage are usually because of waiting for material delivery or for utility crews.

List: typical on-site stages (short checklist)

- protection and marking of utilities
- excavation or trenching
- pipe and bedding installation

- connection to outlet and testing
- backfill and surface restoration

Stage 4: excavation and trenching (a few hours to 2 days) Trenching is the most disruptive, noisy, and visible phase. For a backyard french drain installation in a narrow strip, a mini-excavator can finish the trench in a few hours. For longer runs, rocky soil, or when working around tree roots, excavation can take a full day or more. Clay soils and high water tables slow progress because trenches hold water and need dewatering.

Depth matters. I aim to place perforated pipe deep enough to intercept the water table but shallow enough to avoid major root systems when possible. Typical depths range from 12 to 24 inches for yard drains, deeper when intercepting groundwater near foundations. Always coordinate depth with utility locates; you cannot dig blindly.

Stage 5: pipe, stone, and layout (a few hours to 1 day) After trenching, crews lay a base of crushed stone, place the perforated pipe (for French drains) or solid piping for stormwater conveyance, and wrap or cover where required. Many backyard drainage contractors use geotextile fabric to separate stone from native soil and prevent silting. The pipe gradient is critical. A minimum slope of 1 percent, that is roughly 1 inch of drop per 8 feet, is common for gravity drainage; steeper if long runs or low outlet elevation exists.

If the system ties to a storm sewer, a catch basin is installed at the low point. Catch basins need proper frame and grate levels to match final grading. When tying into municipal systems, crews must follow the specifics required by the permit, which can add inspection steps.

Stage 6: backfill, compaction, and testing (half day to 1 day) Backfilling with clean stone around perforated pipe gives the system porosity so water flows freely. The trench is usually filled to a point, then covered with fabric and native soil or topsoil. Proper compaction prevents future settling. For small trenches, walk-behind plate compactors work; for larger fills, a vibratory plate or small roller may be necessary.

Testing the system is simple but essential. We run a hose, flood the low area, or wait for the next rainfall to confirm water moves to the outlet and no clogging occurs. If the system is fed by downspouts, we temporarily connect and observe. If testing reveals low slope, silt, or side runoff entering the trench, crews adjust pipe or add extra stone.

Stage 7: surface restoration and landscaping (1 to 5 days [backyard drainage solutions](#) depending on scope) Restoring the surface is the part homeowners notice most. A contractor who skips neat finishing costs a repeat call later. For lawns, crews usually add several inches of screened topsoil, grade to match existing lawn, and hydroseed or lay sod. Sod gives instant appearance but costs more; seeded lawns take longer to blend.

Hardscape repairs, such as replacing pavers or fixing a walkway, may require a mason or separate subcontractor. Replanting shrubs and thinly mulching disturbed beds typically takes a day. For preservation of mature plants, we sometimes install root protection and hand-dig around critical root zones, which extends the schedule but preserves established landscape value.

Common additions that extend the timeline Several factors commonly add time and should be anticipated.

If the project uncovers unexpected utilities or abandoned lines, we stop and call the utility owner. Resolving the situation can add days. If bedrock or large boulders appear, excavation slows and may require rock-breaking tools. High groundwater requires continuous pumping during work and sometimes a redesign toward a sealed system or a sump pump. Homeowners who want additional features during the same mobilization, for example converting a drain outlet into a decorative dry creek, add scope and time.

Example projects: timelines and realities Example 1: corner yard pooling near downspouts Problem: 15-foot by 10-foot area collects water after storms. Soil is compacted clay. Outlet is a curbside storm drain three houses down.

Solution and timeline: initial visit and minor soil infiltration test in one day, design proposal next day. After approval, crew mobilizes the following week. They install a shallow French drain 25 linear feet, tie into curb outlet, and replace sod. Excavation and installation take one day, testing and backfill half day, and sod restoration another day. Total on-site time: 2.5 days. Total elapsed, including scheduling and delivery: about 10 days.

Example 2: backyard with repeated flooding and poor slope toward foundation Problem: yard slopes toward house foundation, water pools along basement wall.

Solution and timeline: design includes regrading away from foundation, a French drain along the foundation, and redirecting downspouts. A permit is required to tie into the municipal storm system. Initial assessment and survey two days, permit approval three weeks, mobilization and excavation three days, backfill and grading two days, and final inspection another week for the permit. Total on-site time: about 5 days. Elapsed project time: around five to six weeks.

Costs, trade-offs, and scope decisions Costs vary widely by region and soil conditions, so present numbers as ranges. A simple 25-foot French drain installed by a backyard drainage contractor often ranges from a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars, depending on access, stone quality, and whether sod replaces disturbed grass. Larger regrading and multi-basin systems can reach several thousand to over ten thousand dollars. Labor often dominates the bill when excavation is difficult or when hand-digging is required near trees.

Trade-offs are real. Choosing a shallow surface swale saves money and time but needs a reliable outlet and changes the yard's look. A buried French drain preserves the surface but costs more and involves a deeper trench. Connecting to a municipal storm line is elegant and low-maintenance but may require engineering and permits, adding time and cost.

Maintenance and follow-up Installation is half the job. I provide a walkthrough after completion to show where the pipe runs and where catch basins are. Keep an eye on any depressions that develop in the first season. If turf settles over a new trench, add topsoil and reseed or lay sod. Clean catch basin grates annually, and inspect downspout connections after heavy leaf fall.

If you have a French drain, adding a simple access cleanout at the low end makes future clearing easier. For systems that use gravel envelopes, expect minimal maintenance if the design prevents silt intrusion. If the yard experiences more runoff than predicted, upgrades may be needed. I tell clients to budget for a small contingency for tweaks within the first year.

Practical tips for hiring and scheduling Hire someone who visits the site, sketches options, and explains trade-offs. Ask for references for similar projects and photographs of finished work. Get a written scope that includes who supplies sod or seed, how deep trenches will be, and what happens if unexpected utilities or rock are encountered. Do not let a contractor start without utility locates logged.

When booking, consider seasons. Fall and spring are busy for yard drainage services. Summer is better for sod establishment if you are replanting, while winter can complicate trenching in frozen ground. If you need a quick fix ahead of a family event, consider temporary measures such as raised beds, sandbagging low points, or portable pumps until a permanent solution is installed.

When things go wrong in reality On one project I managed, we planned a two-day job to install a French drain along a property line. The first day we hit a buried concrete slab from a long-gone patio. Removing it required a jackhammer and postponed finishing until the next day. Because we had built contingency into the schedule, the homeowner understood the delay and accepted the extra cost. On another job, we tied into a neighboring storm line only to find it was blocked. The neighboring property owner required negotiation, and the permit office needed documentation. That added a week.

These are not failures, they are field realities. The best mitigation is transparency: show photos, explain why extra time is needed, and offer options. Often a small redesign can save days.

Final considerations Backyard drainage installation is part engineering, part craft. A clean diagnostic saves wasted effort, and a good crew can complete most installations with minimal disruption if the homeowner and contractor plan for the common contingencies I described. Whether you are looking to fix standing water in backyard corners, pursue backyard stormwater drainage that ties to municipal systems, or simply improve lawn drainage solutions, understanding the stages and realistic timelines helps you choose the right scope and [backyard stormwater drainage your.omahachamber.org](http://your.omahachamber.org) budget, and keeps the yard usable sooner.

If you want, describe your yard layout, problem areas, and any known constraints like mature trees or a required outlet, and I will outline a likely timeline and preferred approach for your specific situation.