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### Riparian Buffers

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Learn about riparian buffer



#### What is a riparian buffer:

Also called a **riparian corridor** or forested buffer, it is the area of land next to a stream - the streambanks and **floodplain** area. Typically, in nature, these areas are forested.

#### Why protect riparian buffers:

Riparian buffers provide numerous environmental and recreational benefits to streams, groundwater and downstream land areas. All landowners (individuals, businesses and municipalities) should make every effort to preserve riparian buffers and improve them. Existing buffers can be protected through ordinance requirements, through easement agreements or simply through a conscious effort to decrease mowing and maintain trees and shrubs.

#### Why restore riparian buffers:

In addition to protecting existing buffers, research has shown that stream damage can be minimized and water quality enhanced through installing riparian buffers where they have been previously removed. Landowners can plant trees and shrubs in areas where there is a gap in the riparian buffer to begin a restoration project. However, most plans to restore a riparian buffer involve more than just planting trees and should be coordinated with the local municipality and an agency experienced with stream restoration practices.

#### Benefits:

Research has identified numerous benefits to protecting and restoring riparian buffer areas. Buffers have been found to: increase **groundwater infiltration**, provide cooler water and air temperatures, decrease **streambank erosion**, filter sediments and pollutants commonly found in runoff, provide floodwater storage, increase wildlife habitat and provide recreation areas.

#### Cost:

There is little or no cost involved in protecting existing riparian buffers. Restoring forested buffers requires an initial investment in plant materials, tools and labor. However, the long-term cost savings due to decrease mowing requirements for a restored buffered area can be quite significant.

#### Maintenance:

Watering new plantings and removing **invasive weeds** are the primary maintenance requirement for restored riparian buffers. Ongoing maintenance activities for all buffers may include selective cutting and/or pruning and replanting bare spots or unsuccessful trees and shrubs. Riparian buffer areas should not be mowed frequently --only about once per year for newly created buffer areas. Existing, mature riparian areas should require no mowing at all.

#### Materials:

Trees, shrubs and wetland grasses can all be used to restore or enhance a riparian buffer area. See the list of recommended plants below.



**Suggested plants:**

Native vegetation should be used whenever possible to restore a riparian buffer.

**Trees:**

American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), Black willow (*Salix nigra*), Pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), Pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), River birch (*Betula nigra*), Tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*)

**Shrubs:**

American elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*), Arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), Highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), Red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*), Silky dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) Witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

**Grasses & Sedges:**

Big blue stem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Broom sedge (*Carex scoparia*), Riverbank wild rye (*Elymus riparius*), Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) Switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*)

**Perennial Flowers:**

Beard-tongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*), Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*), New England Aster (*Aster novae-angliae*), Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

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