

# WATERFRONT WISDOM — HEALTHY HABIT #4: PLANT AND MAINTAIN A NATURALIZED SHORELINE OR STREAMBANK BUFFER

As a waterfront homeowner, you have a unique opportunity to contribute to the health of your local waterway. Many activities we conduct near the waterfront, in our lawns and gardens and around our home, impact water quality. This is even more critical to riparian homeowners because runoff doesn't have far to travel before reaching the water. We can prevent water pollution by being aware that our actions DO impact water quality. We can all make a difference by practicing Healthy Habits for Clean Water.

**CHALLENGE:** Storm water runoff pollution, soil erosion and degraded habitat and water quality. Concentrated goose droppings along the shoreline.

**CAUSE:** Turf grass mowed to the water's edge provides a conduit for pollutants to enter waterways and attract nuisance waterfowl, like Canada Geese. The lack of deeper root systems in turf grass and removal of the natural shoreline can lead to erosion at the water's edge.

**SOLUTION:** MAINTAIN A VEGETATIVE BARRIER OF TREES, SHRUBS, TALLER GRASSES AND WILDFLOWERS BETWEEN THE SHORELINE AND UPLAND AREA.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**START SIMPLE:** Stop mowing to the water's edge and allow a strip of grass, called a no-mow zone, to grow between the yard and the shoreline or streambank. Native plant seeds that have been dormant in the soil will germinate and valuable native plants will start to grow on their own.

**GO NATIVE:** Landscaping with Michigan native plants is economical because they are adapted to local soil and climate conditions and once established will require less watering and fertilizing. Native plants also naturally resist pests and diseases, eliminating the need for harmful pesticides.

- Native plants will attract wildlife, such as butterflies, dragonflies and hummingbirds, and will discourage nuisance species, like Canada Geese.
- Native plants have extensive root systems that travel far into the ground which help to stabilize soils against erosion. They also promote infiltration of water, and filter pollutants and sediment from runoff. Native aquatic plants provide optimum feeding and spawning habitat for aquatic species.

**DO NOT DISTURB!** Minimize disturbance of existing submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation and try to keep cleared swimming areas as small as possible. Aquatic vegetation clarifies water, soaks up excess nutrients, helps stabilize the shoreline with its dense root systems and provides habitat for fish and other aquatic life.

**BUFFER IT:** Maintain a vegetative barrier around your property, especially adjacent to waterways, to filter pollutants from runoff exiting your property and to prevent erosion along the shoreline or streambank.



- Plant a diversity of native plant species for optimum wildlife habitat. Beneficial native plantings include wildflowers, prairie grasses, sedges and shrubs. For a complete list of Michigan native plants, go to [www.mnppa.org](http://www.mnppa.org) or contact your local MSU Extension office.



Black-eyed Susan

Bee Balm

Liatris

New England Aster

**REDUCE TURF GRASS ON YOUR PROPERTY:** Cut as small a path as possible through your buffer to access your waterfront. This will save both money and time that otherwise would be spent on maintaining your lawn!

**KNOW YOUR STUFF:** Be aware of Michigan's most common invasive plants and the most appropriate methods to control or eliminate them. Make sure you don't start pulling out areas infested with invasive aquatic plant species—it can actually make the problem worse by producing plant fragments which can root, or cause their seeds to disperse to other areas.

### Common Southeast Michigan Invasives:

- Phragmites or Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*)
- Eurasian Watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)
- Frogbit (*Hydrocharis morsusraanae*)
- Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
- Curly Leaf Pondweed (*Potamogeton crispus*)