



## LANDSCAPING BY A LAKE

If you own or rent a home in a lake area, you want to protect and maintain the quality of that lake water. **The single most important thing you can do is to create what is called a buffer zone of plants** between your property and the lake itself. Buffer zones do three things:

- Buffer zones block or screen out contaminants from getting into the lake. Contaminants are things like fertilizers or weed killers or loose soil particles. Contaminants get carried into lake water when heavy rain or sprinkler irrigation runs off the land surface into the lake.
- Buffer zones reduce the impact of wave action from the lake on the shore itself. The buffer zone will minimize erosion and scouring of the lake edge.
- Buffer zones provide safe habitat for birds and small mammals and fish. Having more kinds and sizes of plants in the buffer zone means having more kinds of birds and wildlife and a healthier lake environment. Also, the wider the zone, the better it functions.

**Plants to have in a vegetative buffer zone** are native plants that like to live in a wetland area. Trees include alders, aspens, birches, willows, and, if there is ample space, cottonwoods. Shrubs include red-twig dogwood, oceanspray, thimbleberry, wild rose and Douglas spirea. Low growing plants include a variety of ferns, sedges and rushes.

**People generally like to have an open view of the lake from their house, but this isn't what is best for the lake or the wildlife.** If you want to have a break in the vegetative buffer zone for some beach area for swimming or boat access, make a path from your property through the buffer zone to a clearing at the edge. Keep some vegetation between the beach area and the yard itself.

**Reducing lawn area helps minimize harm to lake water.** The more lawn there is, the more potential for excess fertilizer and/or weed killers to ultimately end up in the lake. Decide how much lawn area you and your family want for recreation and use shrub beds, pathways, and deck areas in other areas. **Don't plant lawn that reaches all the way to the water's edge.** Create a space for the buffer zone that is so important for healthy lakes. In caring for the lawn, use organic or slow release fertilizers that won't dissolve quickly into excess nitrogen. And don't overwater lawns. The more water that is applied to your lawn, the more potential there is for pollutants to wash into the lake.

This may seem like a lot of changes for your lake property, but don't feel overwhelmed. Start with a small area and develop it or change it in stages over a few years. Start with a small area for native shrubs and plants down by the water's edge and add to it.

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