



Water Quality: A Citizen's Guide



Protecting the Water's Edge

The way we take care of the land has a huge impact on water quality. As landowners and citizens it is important that we take care of the land immediately surrounding the river in a way that is beneficial to the river and the wildlife that depend on it.

Riparian zones are areas of vegetation between the river and the surrounding land use, usually a lawn or field. Riparian zones have the capacity to buffer rivers and other waters from polluted runoff from agricultural, urban, residential or other land uses. Healthy riparian zones can absorb sediments, chemical nutrients, and other substances contained in polluted runoff. They also provide for groundwater recharge, diverse habitats and water storage and

release. A healthy, functioning riparian area and associated uplands dramatically increase benefits such as fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, forage, late season stream flow and water quality.

What Can YOU Do to Protect the Water Edge?

By creating a healthy riparian zone on your property, you can help improve water quality.

- **Reduce Turf Grass** - Shoreline and stream bank property planted with turf grass is really an unnatural landscape. While turf grasses slow runoff, their root systems are too shallow to stabilize stream banks or shorelines.

- **Don't Mow to the Waters Edge** - Lawns mowed to the water's edge will do little to control shoreline erosion. In fact, removing native vegetation and replacing it with turf grass usually results in accelerated stream bank and shoreline erosion that degrades water quality. A buffer between 15-25 feet is usually suitable, the more the better.

- **Plant Native Michigan Plants** Native Michigan plants actually help improve water quality, and they're an attractive alternative to turf grass. Native plants generally have deeper roots which absorb runoff and break down pollutants that would

otherwise go straight to the river. Native plants can be found at your local nursery.

Having a clean environment is of primary importance for our health and economy. Clean waterways provide recreation, commercial opportunities, fish habitat, and add beauty to our landscape. All of us benefit from clean water - and all of us have a role in getting and keeping our lakes, rivers, wetlands, and groundwater clean. For more easy steps on protecting our lakes and streams, visit www.mywatersheds.org.

