



Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District

Technical Bulletin # 98-002

Subject: Living with Backyard Streams

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Living with Backyard Streams

Few things in the landscape are more appealing than a stream meandering through a wooded ravine.

Streams and the land immediately surrounding them are one of nature's most important habitats called **riparian** areas. As a riparian landowner you reap benefits daily from the stream's natural attributes. Wildlife, fish habitat, and water quality are also dependent on this **riparian zone**. Urbanization, a fact of life in Lake County, is increasingly encroaching on riparian areas.

Urbanization results in the addition of hard or impervious surfaces including roads, rooftops and parking lots, causing greater storm water runoff. As runoff velocity and volume increase stream banks erode, water becomes turbid and sensitive habitats are degraded. Changes to the natural shape of the stream, **channelization**, often accompanies urbanization and further disrupts habitat and increasing erosion. Adding to the problem is the removal of native stabilizing vegetation along banks and shorelines and replacement with invasive, less protective species.

Vegetation is your number one resource for protecting ravine slopes, especially deep-rooted trees. Try to use native species as non-natives are frequently more aggressive than native species and can take over entire sections of riparian areas.

Components of Backyard Riparian Management

Healthy streams provide effective storm water conveyance and fish and wildlife habitat. Loss of natural buffers and excessive debris both natural and manmade can cause blockages, reduce channel capacity, elevate flood stages and increase erosion.

Tips:

- Routinely check stream channels for debris and new trash. Remove any trash and excessive debris immediately. Some woody debris is good for habitat.
- Never dump yard waste along stream banks as it will destabilize the bank when plants and their root systems are killed. Yard waste also causes water quality problems related to excessive nutrient and organic loads.
- Overuse and misapplication of fertilizer can cause major water quality problems. Follow directions • avoid spillage • don't fertilize plants near stream • keep clear of storm sewers.
- Establish a natural buffer along stream banks. A thick strip of natural vegetation will hold stream banks together and filter pollutants from surface water before it reaches the stream.
- Never use heavy equipment (including riding mowers) within 10 feet of stream.
- Don't build any new structures within 30 feet of stream as this will destabilize stream banks and cause more storm water runoff.

Contact the Lake SWCD for free assistance with stream management

Source: Living in Ravine & Lakefront Communities, City of Highland Park, IL
Ohio Stream Management Guide, Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Native plants that can be used to re-establish vegetative cover on stream banks:

Trees		Shrubs		Grasses / Wildflowers
Sugar Maple	sun	Grey Dogwood	shade	Pennsylvania Sedge
Cotton Wood	sun	Red Dogwood	sun	Bottlebrush grass
White Ash	p/shade	Honeysuckle	p/shade	Canada Wild Rye
Basswood	shade	RV Honeysuckle	sun	Panic Grass
SB Hickory	sun	Wild Plum	shade	Columbine
Red Oak	sun	Blackhaw	shade	Blue Phlox
White Pine	sun	Sandbar Willow	sun	Trout Lilly
Black Walnut	sun	Witchhazel	shade	Trilliums
Service Berry	shade	Nanny Berry	shade	May Apples
Paper Birch	sun			
Black Cherry	sun			

Contact the Lake SWCD for a complete plant list.