

Managing Your Shoreline

If properly managed, your shoreline can be an efficient natural buffer system between the lake and the surrounding landscape. In fact, shorelines are the most important tool you have to protect the lake. Some of the specific steps you can take are to:

- leave an unmowed buffer strip along the lake at least 20 feet wide
- set your lawn mower to leave the grass two or three inches long beyond the buffer strip
- plant steep banks with native vegetation that binds the soil and traps the water
- terrace steep banks when possible to further slow water and sediments
- don't tamper with existing wetlands



Less Lawn Care Means More Lake Protection

If we love our lakes, we need to change our idea about what looks good. That short, weed-free lawn that many of us admire can actually hurt our lake because it:

- takes more chemicals to keep it green
- does not provide good habitat for wildlife

Less Chemicals: Excess fertilizers and pesticides can go into the nearest lake, river or well. The resulting algae blooms remind us that using less chemicals is better. If you must use fertilizer, have a soil test done first and follow the recommendations. Try to use phosphorus-free fertilizers, slow-release nitrogen, and leave a buffer area near the lake where no chemicals are used.

Less Waste: Grass clippings are high in nutrients so you want to keep them out of the lake. Bag grass clippings and fall leaves and add them to a compost bin or use a mulching mower on both. Place your compost bin outside of the buffer strip.

Soil Testing: A soil test can provide information on the proper amount of lime and fertilizer to apply to your lawn, garden and other areas of your landscape. When gardeners apply only as much lime and fertilizer as is necessary and at the appropriate time, nutrient runoff into surface or ground water is minimized, money is saved, and plant health is optimized. Soil testing can also be used to diagnose common nutrient deficiencies or toxicities for plants that are growing poorly.

The reliability of the soil test, however, can be no better than the sample you submit. For results you can depend on, it is vitally important that you take samples correctly to accurately represent the soil in your landscape.

Controlling the Use of Toxic Chemicals

All chemical products in your home or yard have the potential to harm the lake. If you follow the yard-care tips presented here you will be reducing the amount of toxic materials reaching the lake. Other ways to reduce the risk of toxic chemical pollution in the lake are:

- don't change your car's oil near the lake
- handle all gasoline and petroleum products with extreme care
- keep your boat and motor in good repair
- avoid strong cleaning agents, most pesticides and fertilizers



Fertilizer: If you think you need to use fertilizer, you may need much less than you think. Don't exceed one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in a single application.

Typical Virginia soils have enough phosphorus to provide for a healthy lawn. Use a no-phosphorus or low phosphorus fertilizer formula for already established lawns. Also, a high percentage of the nitrogen should be water insoluble. This means that the fertilizer continues to release slowly despite the presence of water. Even if it washes into the reservoirs it does not become immediately available to plant life.

Herbicides: A properly-mowed, limed and fertilized lawn should eliminate most weeds. Instead of undertaking a complicated and expensive chemical treatment program, try using recommended lawn care practices for a year or two to increase the quality of your turf naturally. When using herbicides, adhere to the instructions on the label for use and disposal.

Insecticides: Blanket application of some insecticides may kill beneficial organisms which prey on harmful insects. In particular, insecticides will kill parasites which have been known to control gypsy moths. Frequent insecticide applications may predispose your lawn to attacks by other pests. Avoid dousing everything with chemicals. Follow instructions on the insecticide label for use and disposal. Buy no more than you really need. For pest identification and control recommendations, call the Agriculture Information Center.

Maintaining Your Septic System

Conscientious maintenance of your septic system is one of the most critical steps you can take to protect the lake. A septic system is a two-step process to treat human wastes. The wastes flow into a tank where the solids settle out. The liquids then flow into a drainfield or another type of system where

they are decomposed by soil microbes. With properly sized, located, and maintained systems, septic tanks can effectively prevent nutrients from entering the lake.

- make sure a new septic system is the right size for your household
- keep it at least 100 feet from the lake
- install a second drainfield when possible
- keep the drainfield clear
- clean the septic system regularly and have it inspected every few years
- avoid or limit the use of toxic chemicals in the home

Daily actions that can be taken to help your septic system

- avoid using the garbage disposal - compost food wastes instead
- avoid chemical products for your septic that claim less-frequent tank pumping. These products can add excess nutrients to the lake by liquefying more of the sludge
- many of the steps you take to protect the lake - such as conserving water - also help keep your septic system operating efficiently and for a long period of time.

Recycling

- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to recycle nutrients.
- A compost heap makes yard waste useful again as soil conditioner.
- Take oil to oil-collection centers.
- Follow local instructions for hazardous waste materials disposal.