

# Creating and Protecting a Healthy Shoreline

## Questions & Answers

**Q: Can I get rid of existing vegetation to do more attractive "lakescaping"?**

A: "Lakescaping" or "aquascaping" involves much more than gardening on the lakeshore. It relies on the natural abilities of native aquatic plants to improve water quality by filtering runoff, to prevent erosion by breaking the force of waves and anchoring soils on the shoreline, and to create usable habitat for wildlife, such as fish, turtles, frogs, birds and butterflies.

In many cases existing vegetation may be the best choice of plants for the site because it is well-adapted to conditions (such as water levels, soils and light) at a particular site and it already fulfills the needed roles along the shoreline. Removing vegetation disturbs the site and opens the door for exotic species to invade your shoreline. Also, existing native plants are protected by law. An Aquatic Plant Management permit is usually required from the DNR to remove native vegetation.

**Q: Why are natural plantings a better alternative to rip rap for preventing erosion?**

A: Rip rap is expensive and it provides no usable habitat for fish or wildlife. Plants cost less, are a beautiful addition to a shoreline, and provide multiple benefits, such as creating a shoreline buffer strip that intercepts nutrients and sediments before reaching the lake.

**Q: Won't a "naturalized" shoreline look messy and limit access to the lake?**

A: Recreational uses of a shoreline need not be compromised by promoting a healthy plant community. Most lakeshore frontage can provide ample room for beaches, docks and views of the lakes as well as vegetation along the waterfront. The key is proper planning for the different uses, concentrating recreational uses in one area while allowing native plants to flourish in others. Because it may take a few years for native plants to get established, it's important to keep out the real weeds, such as Canadian thistle, reed canary grass, burdock, and nettles. Once established, native vegetation provides a rich and visually attractive pattern of color throughout a prolonged blooming season. Each year, more and more lakeshore owners are realizing this.

**Q: How do I find out which native plants to use and where can I get them?**

A: Start out by identifying the plants that grow in natural areas around local lakes. Because native plants are adapted to local conditions, these have the best chance of growing successfully. When buying plants, look for ones that come from Minnesota, preferably from your own general region. Be sure to avoid prohibited species and remember: A DNR permit is required to harvest plants from local lakes and wetlands. For a list of native plant sources, consult the DNR or your local extension service.