

## The Benefits of Vegetative Buffers

A vegetative buffer is an area of trees and shrubs which filters and absorbs runoff, preventing it from flowing directly into a water body.

How do vegetative buffers work?

- The tree and shrub canopy intercepts raindrops and reduces their impact on the soil.
- Leaf surfaces collect rain and allow for evaporation.
- Ground cover, the duff layer, and shorter plants filter sediment and pollutants from runoff.
- Root systems hold soil in place and absorb water and nutrients.
- An uneven ground surface allows rain and snowmelt to puddle and infiltrate.

Surveyors observed that many lakeside residents had carefully retained the natural vegetation growing near the water. Where the natural vegetation had been removed, some landowners had established effective buffers by planting shrubs, trees, ground cover and other hardy plants between buildings and heavy traffic areas and the lake.



Unfortunately, surveyors also found 24 sites which they felt did not have adequate vegetative buffers. These areas would benefit from re-vegetation by planting buffer strips. Current shoreland zoning rules require a buffer strip to be maintained 100 feet from water bodies like Thompson Lake. In cases of “grandfathered” structures built prior to the law, **homeowners should restore as much vegetation as possible.**

While grass may seem a solution, the type found in most lawns is shallow-rooted and provides only minimal protection against surface erosion. With good planning, vegetative buffers can promote privacy and reduce noise, retain views of the lake and, at the same time, protect the lake from polluted runoff. When re-creating a buffer, native plants like those shown below are strongly recommended. Buffers also can be inexpensively “installed” by not mowing, not raking, and allowing plants to grow up naturally.



### Native Plant Options

From left to right: bearberry; sweet fern; high bush blueberry; dwarf bush honeysuckle.