



Top 10 Tips for Maintaining a Healthy, Natural Shoreline

Maintaining a healthy and natural shoreline on your property is one of the easiest ways to stop the spread of aquatic weeds, slow erosion, and improve water quality in nearshore environments. Not only is maintaining a healthy shoreline good for the environment, but it is also incredibly easy to do at home.

Follow along below to learn more about maintaining a healthy, natural shoreline on your property.

#1: Use native grasses and shrubs along your shoreline to create a natural filter (riparian buffer).

In the riparian zone - the section of land closest to the shoreline – layers of foliage help to control erosion and absorb impurities from surface runoff. Leaves from native plants and small branches break the force of falling rain, filter runoff, and allow the water to infiltrate the soil.

As an added bonus, shoreline shrubs can help to prevent geese encroachment on your property.

#2: Clean up after your pets and don't encourage or feed ducks and geese.

Animal waste left on lawns, beaches, trails, and sidewalks may contain bacteria, parasites and viruses that can get washed directly into lakes, rivers, and streams during rainfall. In addition to causing beach closures, this contamination can pose health risks to humans and wildlife, as well as negatively impact water quality and the surrounding environment.

#3: Use rain barrels to reduce the amount of runoff that flows into nearby water.

Rain barrels are an effective method of reducing surface runoff into nearby water sources and can also be used to supply your lawn or garden with water during the summer, which helps you conserve resources and save money.

#4: Do not remove fallen trees from the water unless they are a hazard to boats or swimmers.

Trees that have fallen into a body of water provide vital nutrients and habitat for aquatic plants and animals, which are destroyed when trees are removed from the water. Unless a fallen tree compromises the safety of swimmers or boaters in the area, it is best to leave the tree in the water to promote a healthy aquatic environment.

#5: Maintain your septic system by pumping it out regularly, every three to five years.

Proper care of your septic system involves regular inspections to ensure the unit is working properly, as well as pumping out the tank every three to five years.

Remember that overloading the septic system with too much water at one time can cause pressure and shorten the life of the system, which is important to consider when running the dishwasher or washing machine or hosting a crowd for the weekend.

#6: Use soft or permeable surfaces, such as gravel or wood chips, to create driveways or paths.

The use of gravel or wood chips allows rainwater to infiltrate into the ground naturally, whereas concrete or asphalt does not. The use of soft, permeable surfaces reduces the risk of flooding and stormwater runoff, while protecting groundwater and drinking water.

#7: Replant disturbed areas of your property as soon as possible to encourage rainwater infiltration and prevent soil erosion.

The addition of drainage paths, grassed swales, or depressions around your home or cottage, set a safe distance away from your foundation, can catch and encourage the infiltration of rainwater flowing off of the roof. By surrounding these areas with native vegetation, you can help stabilize the soil and allow rainwater to be absorbed into the ground.

#8: Use natural methods to maintain your lawn or garden instead of using chemical fertilizers or weed controls.

Grass clippings can act as a natural mulch and fertilizer if left on your lawn, but this is only recommended if your lawn is set back far enough away from the water that the clippings will not be washed into the lake. On a cold-water lake, this distance is 30 metres, and on a warm-water lake, 15 metres is required. Let the grass grow at least seven centimetres long between cuttings to conserve soil moisture and encourage healthy root development.

If you're not quite ready to naturalize your entire lawn, consider naturalizing it in stages, starting with smaller areas. An easy way to do this is to work backwards from the shoreline, naturalizing strips of two to three metres at a time.

#9: Limit waterfront development to 25% or less of the total frontage.

Reduce the impact of waterfront development by selecting dock or boathouse sites with little or no vegetation and developing 25% or less of your total frontage. For example, if your property has 40 metres of shoreline, it is recommended to only develop 4 – 10 metres of the area that will create the smallest impact on the surrounding environment. By setting aside this area for a dock, boathouse, or swimming area, the remaining shoreline can exist naturally.

#10: Naturalize or 'soften' your shoreline by planting native vegetation.

Shorelines bound by concrete, steel, wood, or stone restrict the natural function of the lake and nearby habitat and are only a temporary fix for an eroding shoreline. Planting native vegetation helps to increase soil stability, filter runoff, and improve habitat. Contact your local conservation authority to discuss the potential of removing unnatural retaining walls or barriers and begin your application for a permit.

To learn more about creating and maintaining a healthy shoreline, visit kawarthaconservation.com/ErosionAndShorelines or get in touch with Danielle Marcoux-Hunter, Landowner and Community Support, by email at dmarcouxhunter@kawarthaconservation.com or phone at 705-328-2271 ext. 242.