



North Oaks Conservation Award

Wetland Conservation Best Practices

Wetlands were once considered wasted space, a hindrance to urban development and crop production. In Minnesota, an estimated 11 million acres of wetlands have been drained or filled over the last hundred years, leaving about 10 million acres. While this represents a 50 percent loss Statewide, some areas of Minnesota have lost more than 90 percent of their original wetlands.

Benefits of wetlands:

- Wetlands reduce flooding by slowing excess water runoff during times of heavy rainfall.
 - Wetlands improve water quality by filtering sediments, nutrients, and toxic substances out of the water before it washes into rivers and lakes.
 - Wetlands provide habitat for many fish, wildlife and plants, some of which can only survive in wetlands.
 - Wetlands are important outdoor science and art classrooms and laboratories.
 - A growing awareness of these benefits has led to many laws regulating wetland draining and filling, as well as the discharge of pollutants into wetlands.
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Best Practices for Wetlands:

Idea #1: Build Greenbelt Gardens & Buffers for Wetlands

Buffers, also called buffer strips or greenbelts, are located between land and water. They filter pollutants and improve water quality. Buffers absorb excess runoff and nutrients such as phosphorus, a culprit behind algae blooms.

Our regional watershed VLAWMO (Vadnais Lake Area Watershed Management Organization) partners with our city to install buffers, conducts buffer surveys of private and public lands, and educates the public about the aesthetic and water quality benefits of greenbelt gardens.



Idea #2: For Waterfront Properties - Build Greenbelt Gardens

Do you want to increase the long-term value of your substantial investment in waterfront property while protecting water quality? One of the easiest, most beautiful and cost-effective ways to do this is to incorporate a greenbelt garden in your landscaping.

A greenbelt garden is simply a strip of plants such as native flowers, shrubs and trees planted between your lawn and the water. Your greenbelt can look as manicured or as natural as you like. Buffers can be professionally landscaped, or you can simply allow native seeds already in the soil to blossom into wildflowers.

Greenbelt gardens help prevent erosion. They improve water quality by absorbing excess sediments and nutrients before they reach the water.

Grass lawns that extend all the way to the water's edge do not protect water quality. Flowers, trees and shrubs have longer roots and are more effective at absorbing nutrients and preventing erosion. Lawns create more runoff than wooded areas, as they absorb less rain. Bare lawns carry eight times as much phosphorus to waterways than wooded areas the same size.

Benefits of Greenbelt Gardens

Greenbelt buffers provide these aesthetic, time-saving and money-saving benefits:

- Saving as much as 48% in maintenance costs as compared to traditional landscaping
- Spending less time on high-maintenance lawn care such as mowing, weeding and fertilizing—that means more leisure time for you!
- Preventing erosion, which is vastly more cost-effective than repairing shoreline
- Enhancing your view of the lake by framing it with plants, grasses, shrubs and trees to render your scene even more picturesque
- Creating a meandering path to the shore, incorporating the cherished element of unfolding and expanse in your landscape plan
- Attracting birds, butterflies and other wildlife.

Idea #3: Install a Rain Garden

Contact VLAWMO for help designing and possible grant funding for rain gardens.

A rain garden will:

- Filter runoff pollution
- Recharge local groundwater
- Conserve water
- Improve water quality
- Protect rivers and streams
- Remove standing water in your yard
- Reduce mosquito breeding
- Increase beneficial insects that eliminate pest insects
- Reduce potential home flooding
- Create habitat for birds, bees and butterflies
- Survive drought seasons
- Reduce garden maintenance
- Increase garden enjoyment