

CHAPTER FIVE

Maintaining and Sustaining the Buffer Landscape

Time spent maintaining newly planted lakeshore buffers will pay off because little maintenance will be needed in future years when the landscape is well established. It can take two to five years for your landscape to become low maintenance. However, the time period for a buffer landscape to become well established will vary according to growing conditions and the size of the initial plant material selected.

Principles:

- Once your plantings are established, care should be focused on control of invasive weeds. Weed competition is a significant factor in limiting the success of the buffer plant growth and survival.
- Diligent management in the first two years will be rewarded with an attractive low-maintenance buffer landscape for years to come.
- Once established, native plants have a competitive advantage over other plants because they will require less watering and mowing, and you will not have the cost of adding insecticides and fertilizers

First Growing Season:

The first year after planting your buffer landscape is the most important time for establishing strong, healthy plants.

Watering

During the first growing season, supplemental watering of up to one inch per week depending on rainfall, will help establish deep, healthy roots. Avoid frequent shallow watering which encourages roots to stay on the surface. Slow, gentle soaking for trees and shrubs will help develop healthy root systems and reduce runoff and erosion on steep slopes.

Control weeds during the first year

Learn to identify invasive species. You should plan to hand pull invasive weeds weekly if possible. Pulling weeds when young will make it easier to remove all of the young root system and prevent weeds from going to seed and spreading throughout the area.

Spread mulch between plants to help discourage weeds until plants become established.

Use landscape fabric sold in rolls and mats to provide shade and prevent seed deposits around newly planted trees. The fabric will be effective for several years and can be removed when a canopy is established to shade out weed growth.

Use safe appropriate herbicides, if necessary, for weed control under specific

circumstances.

Have patience since plants can take two to five years to flower or become fully established.

Nutrients

Never fertilize native species. Fertilizer will encourage fast weak growth, and plants will flop over resulting in unattractive planting beds.

Mulching

Maintaining two to four inches of a coarse, slow-to-decompose medium such as shredded bark, compost, leaf mulch, wood chips, or pine needles will help retain soil moisture, retard evaporation, moderate soil temperature, and provide some weed suppression.

Leaving a 2 to 3 inch air space between the tree trunk and mulch will help prevent the creation of a moist area where boring insects or fungus growth can occur.

Shredded hardwood mulch provides several advantages over other mulches. It provides weed control and good moisture retention and is relatively unaffected by wind and rain. The coarser the mulch the slower the mulch will decompose providing greater benefit to the growing plantings.

All mulch except pine needles should be well composted to prevent leaching of nitrogen during the decomposition process. Non-composted mulch can also contain disease organisms or insects which can harm plantings.

SAFE EFFECTIVE MULCH CHECKLIST:

- **2-4 inches**
- **Coarse moderate mulch slow to decompose**
- **Leave air space around tree and shrub trunks**
- **Use well composted mulch**
- **Use shredded bark, compost, leaf mulch, wood chips, or pine needles**
- **Do not use the nugget style of mulch; the nuggets wash away easily.**

Second Growing Season:

Preventing woody natives from getting established is important during the second season and until native planting can become fully established. Learn to identify woody natives like willows, soft maples, and poplars. Clear these to prevent the establishment of woody thickets in the landscape. To prevent resprouting, pull or dig up these trees rather than cutting them off at base.

Weeding should continue the second year especially in native grass and shrub planting beds. Instead of mowing or clipping weeds off at ground level, pull up weed seedlings to prevent them from going to seed.

Cutting back the previous year's growth of herbaceous plants is necessary to stimulate new healthy plant growth. Spring is a good time to cut back herbaceous plant growth from the previous year to the proper height depending on the plant. This step will present a neat appearance until new growth begins.

Routine maintenance as plants become established is determined by growing conditions. Regular watering is not necessary once plants are established. Supplemental watering is needed only during drought periods.

In the fall leave dried vegetation standing to provide seeds and habitat areas for birds and other wildlife and to help prevent leaf litter from blowing into the lake.

Staking large trees

In windy areas large trees may be staked during planting. The stakes should be removed after one year.

Long Term Maintenance:

Pruning established plantings

Prune back overgrown plants to control growth and to maintain healthy growing conditions for neighboring plants. This step will also help maintain attractive naturally shaped plantings. Thin out dead or misshapen interior branches to stimulate new healthy growth. Replace dead plants as soon as possible to prevent erosion.

Pruning Tips

- Thin dead or miss-shaped interior growth to encourage healthy growth
- Prune co-dominant leader branches
- Do not prune dominant leader branches or tips
- Prune rubbing or overlapped branches
- Prune broken branches
- Prune narrow crotch angles

Thinning overgrown grasses

Cut back mature ornamental grasses to eight to twelve inches to stimulate new growth.

Dig and divide the plants to revitalize growth when grass clumps begin to die off in the middle of the clump. Dividing the clumps also provides a source of new plants for cost effective expansion of the buffer landscape.

Changing as plants mature

Replace unsuccessful plantings with other species that have proven particularly successful in the same growing conditions. Plants that do not survive the first year may not be suitable for the growing conditions where they were planted. The plants may be incompatible with water, light, soil conditions, or nutrients available.

Expect the landscape to change as plants mature and planting beds fill in. As trees

mature, light and shade conditions will also change. These changes will affect the ways in which certain species grow and spread.

Enjoy your changing and growing buffer landscape and know that you are protecting your property investment and protecting the quality of the lake.

References:

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