

Planting Your Buffer

Did you Know...

The easiest way to start a riparian buffer is to let it grow naturally.

If left alone, seeds from plants in the area will begin to grow along your streambank. Some “pioneer” tree species that will probably be the first to grow include willow, sycamore, silver maple, locust, and sumac.

Keep in mind that plant communities go through a natural succession when they develop (grasses, taller herbaceous plants, shrubs and finally trees), so your buffer may look “brushy” at first. Be patient! As your buffer grows from season to season, it will change to resemble a mature plant community for your area.



Planting vegetation along streambanks provides a buffer that prevents erosion, filters pollutants, and slows surface runoff. Consider these tips when planting a riparian buffer:

- **Consider your options.** Different types of plants provide different benefits. Grasses can slow runoff and filter some pollutants, but provide the least amount of protection to the streambank. Shrubs and trees provide food sources for the stream, shade which regulates water temperatures, and stability which prevents bank erosion.
- **Go native.** Native plants are already well suited to growing in your area. They will be healthier, require less maintenance, and provide food and habitat for wildlife. Native plants can be harvested from other parts of your own property, or purchased from a nursery. Check the list included in this packet for common native plants that grow well in riparian buffers, and local nurseries where you can purchase native plants.
- **Beware of invasive species.** Invasive species are plants that grow and spread excessively, displacing the majority of other plants. This reduces the diversity of the ecological community, which is the key to a healthy environment. Many invasive species also have shallow root systems, which provide less protection against erosion. You can get more information on invasive plants and alternative plantings from the WVDNR or the WV Native Plant Society.
- **Plan the best buffer for your property.** A vegetation buffer as small as 20 feet can make a difference. For larger streams, or in areas of frequent erosion, 100 feet or more will provide the most benefit to the stream. Devote as much area as you can to planting a buffer, considering the benefits of preventing erosion and improving water quality.

Planting Live Cuttings

Did you know...

Willow trees grow easily from cut branches?

Stakes

1-2 inches in diameter
1-2 feet long

Posts

3-5 inches in diameter
3-4 feet long

Logs

6+ inches in diameter
5+ feet long

Three foot centers is the recommended spacing for most types of willows.



Plants along the stream stabilize the bank, prevent erosion, provide food and shelter for wildlife, and regulate the water temperature. Planting trees can improve your property and the quality of the stream.

You don't need to purchase trees to start a riparian buffer. Several types of trees grow easily from cuttings, such as willow and hackberry. You can find trees on your property, or ask a neighbor. Live cuttings are an easy and inexpensive way to start improving your streambank.

How To Plant Live Cuttings

Cut and plant during dormancy, when trees are not growing, from late fall to early spring for the best success.

1. Begin by finding a mature, healthy tree as your harvest source. Use the list on the left to decide what size of planting you want.
2. Cut the section at a 45 degree angle. This creates a point for the widest end of the cutting to be planted.
3. Remove all side branches.
4. Cut to desired length, making sure the top is cut flat.
5. Keep the cuttings cool and moist until planting. Wrap them in wet burlap or store in a bucket of water.
6. Plant
 - To plant stakes and posts, use a rubber mallet to carefully drive the angled end into the ground. Plant approximately 2/3 the length of the stake or post underground. Be careful not to split or damage the top of the stake.
 - To plant logs, place the log on the bank parallel to the to the stream, close to the water's edge. Bury 2/3 of the length of the log in the bank, being sure that the exposed end faces downstream.