

Do you have a riparian strip on your land? Should you mow it in the fall? Cover it? Mow it?

(Unofficial translation from: <https://jardinierparesseux.com/2023/09/20/bande-riveraine-faucher-ou-ne-pas-faucher/>)

Whether you are a farmer or your cottage is on the edge of a lake, your waterfront provides you with enormous services, and you will also be doing the environment a service if you take care of it. If you're not sure what to do in the fall with this little corner of nature, this article is for you!

The services that the waterfront provides you as an owner:

You like to enjoy the view of your lake, your dock, the sound of the water. But did you know that letting vegetation grow three meters wide along your bank is the best thing you can do to secure your land? Already, if you have brambles or other prickly plants, the nasty thieves will think twice, and spring floods as well as landslides can be enormously reduced with good vegetation at the water's edge .

How does a riparian strip work?

In spring, plants waking up from dormancy, or new annual shoots, are thirsty and absorb a large quantity of water. In addition, the sturdy roots of trees, shrubs and other large perennials act as a mesh that keeps the soil in its place.

Imagine the bottom of your sink: if you empty a glass of water into it, it flows towards the drain, which symbolizes your water point. The deeper layers of the soil are the same: water trickles there and flows towards the river or lake.

Put a layer of sand in your sink (but not for real, eh! Pretend to do it, I don't want to receive your plumber's bills!). As soon as you run the water out of your glass, the sand will flow down the drain as well. This sand represents your soil... and possible landslides or even erosion of your bank.

Now imagine putting lots of wool in your sink, sand, then water. And there you have it, a floor that does not drain, which absorbs a lot of water, and which is a much more solid foundation for your home!

It's a bit of a strange comparison, I grant you, but I think the picture is clear. Landslides and excess water can be greatly mitigated by mature vegetation on your land.

The services that the riparian strip provides you as a farmer:

If I continue my story of foundation-roots, know that the smallest roots of shore plants also play a role in the cohesion of the earth. They are like a net that holds the soil, as well as the edge of your field, which is more than necessary if you are farming near water.

Bank erosion is a big problem when farming: who wants to see their land reduced, year after year, because of the soil that is washed away by the rains and the current? Besides, annual crops like corn are not the best to grow near water if you don't have a nice plant bank since the soil, without any net of roots, will erode even more quickly in the spring! A good riparian strip can, however, help fields to not lose their soil, in addition to avoiding flooding of plants near water.

Another service that a healthy riparian strip provides you is to attract nature into your crops. Why is this helpful to you? Having a balanced ecosystem attracts a range of useful animals: pollinating insects, soil recyclers and even predators like toads, snakes or birds. Why spend on pesticides if nature can find a balance and get rid of pests naturally?

What your riparian strip gives to the environment:

You don't want to lose 5 centimeters of your land per year to erosion? Well, tell yourself that neither does nature!

Shorelines are very important to many species, and land "falling" into the water isn't necessarily a good thing either. When the soil is not retained, rain runoff carries many of the soil's nutrients and contaminants... directly into the river water. It is a major source of pollution that a simple trickle of roots can stop.

Riparian plants eliminate a lot of water pollution, in addition to being important CO2 sensors. You know, the nasty gases responsible for climate change that harm crops? Yeah, ecology is like that: everything is linked.

If the riparian strip is a habitat for several terrestrial animals and amphibians, it is also essential for several aquatic species: fish sometimes need these grassy environments to hide, lay eggs or feed. I don't know about you, but I like sushi, so take care of the fish and don't put too much pollutant in the water, OK? I'm giving you my suspicious eyes, there!

With all these arguments, I think it's worth taking care of your shore, right? Raise your terrace a little to have a beautiful view, agree to offer a few meters of your land to the environment, and you will be able to enjoy the singing of the frogs in the evening, while bragging about being super eco-friendly.

How to maintain your shore to get the most out of it for us and nature:

In an ideal world, wetlands, which are so important for the balance of nature, would remain untouched. These environments are perfectly autonomous and you have no need to "help" them.

It still happens that pruning is necessary in certain cases: for example, if you have a dock, you can, armed with shears, prune on each side to prevent it from being invaded by vegetation.

For growers, it can be a little more complex. Some crops, for example, can be extremely sensitive to the presence of more invasive wild plants. At this time, mowing the riparian strip before these “weeds” go to seed may be sufficient to limit the damage. This is ideally carried out from the second half of July: we thus give rural birds, which often make their nests on the ground, the chance to finish their brood. It is also recommended to leave around thirty centimeters of height to your riparian strip during this mowing.

Otherwise, don't touch ANYTHING!

Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES do we mow a riparian strip! Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES do we remove rocks or pieces of dead wood from it. And above all, ABOVE ALL, UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES do we throw waste into the water, and that includes clippings from your mowing. Instead, leave these in your field or lawn and they will decompose, providing fertilizer to your soil.

The lawn being rich in nitrogen, it contributes to the proliferation of algae causing eutrophication. The what? The death of lakes too full of algae. There is a lack of oxygen and light due to too many algae and everything ends up dying because of this imbalance... So, keep your clippings on the ground, my dear lazy gardeners!

In short, all this to say that in the fall, what do we do? NOTHING! A bonus for the lazy gardener!

You'll excuse me, I'm perhaps less funny than usual, but we don't joke with riverside strips! Quebec is so rich in beautiful wetlands, fresh water is such an important and easily accessible resource, that we tend to take all that for granted.

In short, splash! Um...see you!

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