



“Nature does not hurry,  
yet everything is accomplished.”

- Lao Tzu

## Recreating a Healthy Waterfront

The basis of a natural ecosystem is a complex combination of vegetation that forms canopy, understory, and herbaceous layers. It is easier to maintain this complexity than to restore it after most of the vegetation has been removed.

Plant species native to the Muskoka area are adapted to the diverse weather and soil conditions found here. They are more resistant to pests and diseases, and are more likely able to tolerate droughts.

One of the most critical areas to maintain native vegetation is along your shoreline. Shoreline vegetation benefits water quality by reducing the amount of sediment, nutrients, organic matter and pesticides that enter our rivers and lakes.

There is no better way to prevent soil erosion than to leave your shoreline in its natural state. Plant roots anchor the soil, preventing it from being washed away by currents, waves and rain. This preserves fish spawning beds, which can become destroyed by sediment accumulation due to erosion.



Overhanging branches from trees and shrubs shade the waters to prevent overheating and provide cover for small fish and other aquatic organisms.

Debris such as logs and boulders also provide cover for many species, spawning areas for fish, and will serve to reduce the impact of waves on your shoreline.

Many native plant species are extremely attractive. You can create an aesthetically pleasing property while providing food and habitat for wildlife, preventing erosion, and maintaining water quality. The following are some plants that are part of a natural shoreline in Muskoka.

## Renaturalizing Your Shoreline

To return to or maintain a natural shoreline, it is important to remember to encourage diversity. The rule of thumb is to attempt to mimic Mother Nature.

- ❖ Plant deciduous, moisture tolerant trees near the water to create overhangs. This provides shade.
- ❖ Limit access points to the water. A continuous cover at the shoreline provides erosion control and shelter for wildlife.
- ❖ Plant native species. These species will be adapted to local conditions and will be hardier than non-native plants. This will eliminate the need to use fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. These plants will support our local wildlife communities the best.
- ❖ A number of federal, provincial, and municipal laws and regulations influence shoreline work across Canada. Before starting your project, consult with the Ministry of Natural Resources

and Forestry (MNRF) or Fisheries & Oceans Canada (DFO) to see what approvals you may require. Under the federal Fisheries Act, the onus is on property owners to ensure that shoreline work does not harmfully alter, disrupt, or destroy fish habitat without the required authorization from DFO.

## Strategies for Protection/Restoration

### Preservation

- ❖ retain existing natural shoreline
- ❖ minimize access to water to avoid shoreline damage

### Naturalization

- ❖ leave degenerated shorelines to regenerate naturally
- ❖ "hands off " approach (no cutting, no spraying, no fertilizing, no work)

### Enhancement

- ❖ plant native species and remove non-native species such as ornamental shrubs
- ❖ copy Mother Nature

### Restoration

- ❖ plant cleared areas with native species
- ❖ duplicate existing natural shoreline

## Re-think Your Lawn

Approximately 90 percent of the rain falling on a natural shoreline is absorbed before reaching the water, while up to 55 percent of the rain falling on hard surfaces, including lawns, flows right into the lake.

All that runoff hastens erosion, sending silt and sediment into the water where it damages spawning and feeding areas. Pesticides and fertilizers applied to your lawn also play havoc with the aquatic ecosystem. Weed and bug killers may harm fish or destroy the plants and insects that fish feed on, and fertilizers promote algae growth, leading to a greener, murkier lake.

Alternative types of groundcover make use of plants that provide coverage, wildlife habitat and require little maintenance.



Native species have sometimes been difficult or impossible to obtain from commercial sources, however, heightened awareness on the part of consumers and producers has resulted in a better selection of native species being available. Several Muskoka nurseries now carry an impressive variety of native plants. Just ask!

## More Information

There are a number of resources available for waterfront owners wishing to protect their natural shoreline area.

**The Shore Primer**, produced by Fisheries and Oceans Canada in association with Cottage Life, offers cottagers and other landowners constructive solutions for restoring an altered shoreline to its former health and beauty. Available at <http://muskokawaterweb.ca/images/dfo/ShorePrimer-English.pdf>.

**Living in Cottage Country: What You Need to Know**, produced by the Muskoka Watershed Council, is a handbook that provides simple, everyday actions that landowners can undertake to keep cottage country healthy while complying with the various guidelines, regulations and by-laws that exist. Call 705-645-2100 x4387 to purchase your copy!

Muskoka Watershed Council  
[www.muskokawatershed.ca](http://www.muskokawatershed.ca)

Muskoka Water Web  
[www.muskokawaterweb.ca](http://www.muskokawaterweb.ca)