

## Following a Water-Wise Ethic in Your Own Backyard

**H**ave you heard the phrase, “conservation starts in your own backyard”? Many are quick to agree with this phrase, but few actually know how to promote a water-wise conservation ethic in their own backyards.

If you’re thinking about doing some significant landscaping this season and want to follow a water-wise ethic, consider the following advice from Michael Dresen, of the UWEX Lakes Partnership...

### Where to Start

One of the first steps in deciding whether or how to alter the vegetation or topography of your property is to inventory what you have.

An approach might be to list the benefits your property provides and the threats to them. Map the land contours, drainageways, soils, vegetation, wildlife sightings and habitats. Note outdoor use areas where only turf grasses will stand up to the traffic. Record the location of the well and drain field if you have an on-site waste disposal system. Tour your property during a storm which produces significant runoff to locate existing and potential problems. Map eroded shoreline and drainage channels, plumes of sediment from runoff entering the lake or river and other areas such as uninterrupted slopes or unprotected soils where water may gain an erosion foothold. Also note potential sites for drains, diversion berms or storm water infiltration ponds. Judge the severity of runoff and erosion problems on your property and plan stormwater and vegetation management practices. For more information and help, contact your county Land Conservation Department.

Generally, recontouring significant portions of your property will result in more erosion. Avoid terracing and other activities which remove natural vegetation, compact soils or add substantial fill over the root zone of shrubs and trees. Extensive land-disturbing activities may also invite invading weeds or exotic plant species which may be difficult to eradicate.

“The first rule of intelligent tinkering is to save all the parts.”

– Aldo Leopold

### Shoreline Restoration

Attempting restoration of native aquatic plant communities near shore requires some investigation and consultation with professionals. Tour your lake or river to determine which native aquatic plants are growing along shorelines similar to yours. Inventory species which grow in comparable water depths and bottom materials along shores with similar wave or current action. A number of aquatic plant manuals are available to assist you. Learn how these species propagate.

Try to determine the reasons that native aquatics no longer exist along your shoreline. Turbidity caused by overabundant rough fish populations or algal blooms may severely limit light penetration and prevent establishment of rooted aquatics. Invasion by exotic species such as Eurasian water milfoil or erosion caused by boat traffic may be reasons. Sediment or herbicides carried by runoff, variable water levels or ice scouring may all be culprits.

Often a combination of factors is responsible for diminished populations of native water plants. DNR district lake and aquatic plant management specialists or university botanists can help you to discover the root of the problem and recommend a remedy.



Along waterways and inland, good landscaping can help control erosion and reduce runoff pollution.