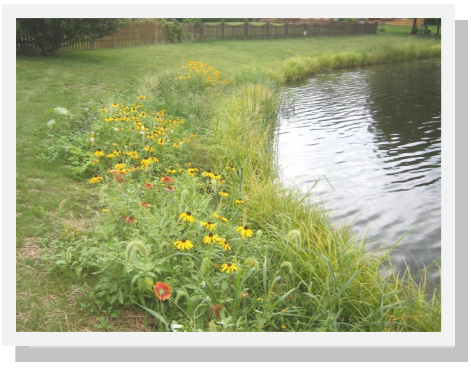
Hamilton County SWCD
Backyard Conservation

Pond Edge Enhancements FAQ

What's the issue?

Today, ponds in our residential communities are commonplace. While many have aesthetic benefits and can be a source of recreation and beauty, there primary function is stormwater detention. Stormwater detention ponds collect runoff that sheds from our roads, roofs, driveways, and other impervious surfaces. Runoff collects in the detention pond and is held there and slowly released into other stormwater infrastructure and ultimately natural waterways like rivers. Detention ponds are required by local government to protect areas downstream from flooding and erosion. Most detention ponds also function to trap pollutants like excess nutrients, metals, and sediment.

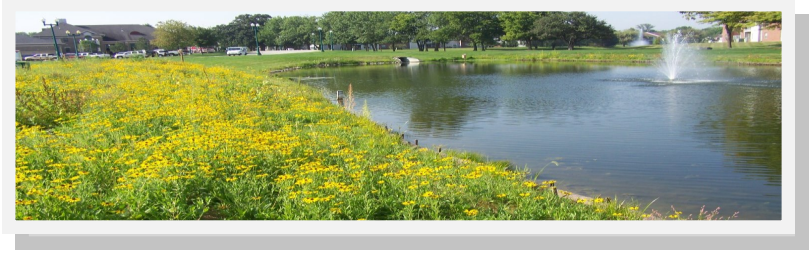


Many detention ponds show signs of degradation and age as time goes by. Algae blooms may become a problem as excess nutrients accumulate in the ponds. Erosion may lead to turbidity or cloudy water. A lack of shoreline and aquatic plants limits habitat for animals, fish and aquatic organisms that help the pond function. Steep shorelines can lead to erosion and banks that "slough" off into the water. Nuisance Canadian Geese may inhabit ponds. These problems may not arise with all ponds, but most suffer from some or all of the above or will at some point. The good news is, there are things you can do to enhance your pond and prevent future degradation and costly repairs.

What are edge enhancements?

Edge enhancements are plantings and landscape management practices that reduce erosion, improve water quality, and add wildlife habitat around bodies of water. These enhancements often include plantings of native flowering plants and grasses along the bank called a filter strip and sometimes planting native "emergent" plantings just below the water's surface.

A filter strip is created by seeding or planting native flowers and grasses around the pond bank. These native plants have roots that extend 2-10 feet down into the ground. These deep roots stabilize the soil and prevent erosion and the pond edge from deteriorating and sloughing off. The planting also slows water down that is draining across the surface of the land preventing erosion. The plants "filter" and absorb some of the excess nutrients and pollutants (fertilizers, chemicals, etc.) that would otherwise end up in the pond and contribute to algal blooms and poor water quality.



Canada Geese: Pond edge filter strips are also deterrents for nuisance Canadian Geese. Geese cannot see over or through an established filter strip so they avoid coming on shore to avoid potential predators. Turf grass to the edge of a pond is an open invitation to Canada Geese to come ashore.

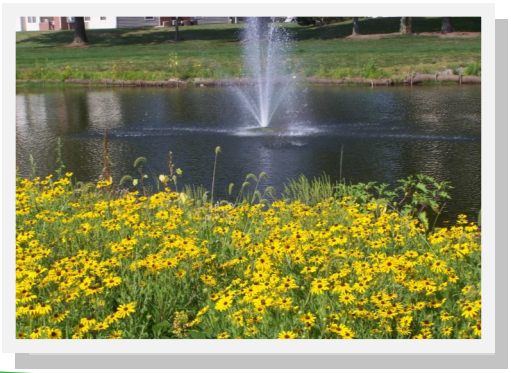
Reduced maintenance: The native plants that make up filter strips are adapted to this area's soils, climate, pests, and weather. They require no fertilizers and rarely need supplemental watering. They do require some weeding and, once established, are trimmed down each spring to encourage new growth. Filter strips replace turf grass that is time and resource intensive to maintain. Over time, the filter strips ability to absorb excess nutrients before getting into the pond may help reduce algae issues and treatments. This reduced maintenance often relates directly to cost savings for individuals and/or HOAs.

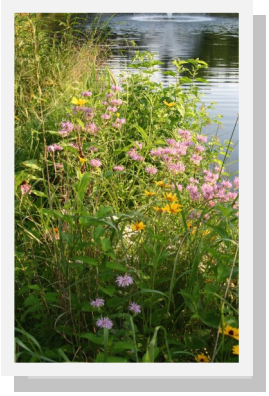
Benefits of natural ecosystems: As communities continue to urbanize and develop more areas that were previously naturalized, it is important to recognize that we are just part of a larger ecosystem that we influence and influences us. Trying to live sustainably and in harmony with our surroundings allows the entire system to function better. Remember that turf grass up to the waters edge is not found in any natural setting. This is mostly because turf grass has no ecological advantages and does not effectively stabilize the bank against erosion. A natural pond edge is what you would find in nature and enhances communities by providing wildlife habitat, biodiversity, visually pleasant landscapes, and ecological value, not to mention reduced maintenance costs. Less mowing, aside from lower costs, also means less lawnmower noise and air pollution. Conservation practices like filter strips also enhance outdoor recreation and provide spaces that are pleasant to spend time in close to home. Filter strips provide great habitat for pollinators like butterflies. In the winter, the plants provide visual interest and continued stabilization as well as habitat and seeds for wildlife and birds.

Wildlife concerns: One person's watchable wildlife can be another's nuisance animal so wildlife concerns can be complicated to address. Filter strips around ponds create wildlife habitat— that is one of their great benefits! The important thing to consider is balance. In natural systems, predators and prey keep each other in balance. We often have nuisance wildlife in our communities because we've thrown that balance off. A well maintained pond edge provides a valuable opportunity to view and enjoy wildlife and is not enough habitat to sustain a large population of pests. A pond edge filter strip should not attract any nuisance wildlife that cannot be addressed with responsibility and a little common sense. Specific questions can be addressed by contacting the Department of Natural Resources or the SWCD.

Allergies: Perennial native plants like those in filter strips do not generally produce wind-borne allergenic pollen. Most of these native flowers are pollinated by insects like butterflies. Native perennial plants can actually help crowd out weedy allergenic species like ragweed.

Property values: Studies show that properties near parks, open spaces, and areas with natural vegetation have higher value than those that do not. Real estate with distinctive and well-done natural landscaping actually possesses a marketing edge over traditionally landscaped areas. Additionally, the cost savings associated with reducing maintenance and preventing costly repairs and stabilizations in common areas can result in lower HOA fees. Additionally, many new communities are required by ordinance to have naturally vegetated pond edges. Therefore, these features are becoming less of the exception and more of the rule.





Contact the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District for more information:

1717 Pleasant St.
Noblesville, IN 46060
317.773.2181
www.hamiltonswcd.org

HAMILTON COUNTY
Soil & Water
CONSERVATION DISTRICT