Maintenance of Native Shoreline Gardens

Proper site maintenance during the first two years is one of the most important steps for a successful shoreline buffer! Regular maintenance during the first few years after planting will give native plants a competitive advantage over weeds. After they are established, the large plants will be able to out-compete most weeds. After the buffer is effectively established, less maintenance will be required.

First Season

Watering:

Plantings need supplemental watering the first year of establishment because their root systems are small and unable to reach the moisture and nutrients they require. For the first year, the plantings will need approximately 1 inch of water per week. As the surface soil dries, roots begin to reach deep to find required moisture. A thick layer of mulch will help to hold the moisture in the soil for a longer period.

Do not water frequently in small amounts, as this will cause the roots to stay near the surface. Watering in the early mornings is best. If it does not rain put a sprinkler out for an hour or two to soak the ground well. It may only be necessary to water 1 to 2 times per week. Be sure to water cautiously to avoid erosion on steep slopes.

Weeding:

Diligent weeding throughout the first season is important to give your plantings the best competitive edge. Keep a careful eye on invasive species such as Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, Reed Canary Grass, and Purple Loosestrife. Pull them when they are small because they are extremely difficult to eradicate once they become established. Look for weeds every 2-3 weeks and hand pull any weeds you may find. Mulching between plants also helps to inhibit weed growth. Only pull plants you can identify. Try labeling the plants with plant markers. This will help you distinguish between the desired plants and a weed.

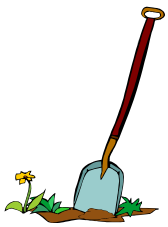
If Buckthorn/Ash/Honeysuckle or any other aggressive tree/shrub species are removed through cutting, you will need to keep a careful eye out for any newly emerging/fast growing shoots. The stumps should be treated with an herbicide at the time of removal. However, these species are extremely difficult to effectively kill upon initial treatment and may need to be marked with a stake or flag (for identification and location purposes), cut back, and then retreated with an appropriate herbicide.

Fertilizing:

Native plantings should not be fertilized. Fertilization actually encourages weeds. Native plants have evolved in our native soils and are generally able to find the nutrients they require without supplemental fertilization. In fact, native plants actually look better without fertilizing. Fertilization can cause the root systems to stay shallow and the tops to become floppy. Additionally, fertilizers can end up washing into the lake and encourage algae/aquatic plant blooms.

Problems with plant Survival:

On very disturbed or eroded sites, the soil may have been altered to such an extent that it is no longer conducive to plant growth. In these cases, fertilization may be necessary. If this is the case, carefully and conservatively apply a No-Phosphorus fertilizer such as Safe-Green. In addition, some of the installed plants may die due to weather related problems. If this occurs, you will need to replace them. When selecting plants for replacement, look to the plants that are doing well in the buffer area and to other native plants that are growing in nearby areas with similar soil, sun and moisture conditions to those conditions on the spot you are to plant.



Second Season:

During the second season, the overall maintenance tasks begin to ease

Watering:

Watering is necessary only during long dry periods. If some plants continually seem to be struggling, reevaluate the plant species chosen for that particular spot. It may be necessary to replant those spots with species that are better accustomed to the specific limiting conditions. Careful initial plant selection should prevent this problem.

Spring Care: Springtime is the best time to tend your shoreline buffer area. Start by cutting back the dried vegetation from the previous year's growth to within 1-2 inches of the ground. This will bring a neat appearance to the planting, but can be skipped if that is not a concern. You can leave the clippings in place as mulch, remove them or use them for compost. Additional mulch may be added if necessary.

Weeding:
Springtime is the best time to do a thorough weeding. Weeds are young and the ground is usually quite soft, making the task much easier. This again will give native plants a competitive edge over invading weeds. Be careful to thoroughly remove the entire root system of invading weeds. Also, be especially aware of new tree/shrub seedlings that you may want to leave in place. Scout for weeds once every 3-4 weeks and again hand pull only the species that you can identify as weeds.

You really must become familiar with both the plants that were planted and the invaders in order to know which plants to pull. Other desirable native species may naturally come into your garden on their own, and some study may be required to become familiar with the new, desirable plants.

Fall Care:
Standing dried vegetation should be left in place, rather then cut and raked. This acts as a buffer to protect the lake from blowing leaves. The standing dried vegetation also provides interest in the winter landscape, as colorful grasses and seed heads peek out of the snow, and provide food and cover for many different birds and mammals.

Long Term Maintenance (3 years and beyond)
Both upland and lakefront plantings are continually susceptible to invasion by non-native plants. As with any garden, controlling this problem is necessary in order to achieve a beautiful and diverse planting.

Spring Care:
Begin each season by cutting dried vegetation and conduct a thorough weeding. Add mulch if needed.

Weeding: Walk through your plantings once per month after spring cleanup to scout for and pull weeds and invading species.

Watering: Generally, no watering should be necessary after the second season of growth except for times of drought.

Fall Care: Leave dried vegetation standing in the fall.