



### What's "Growing on" Along the Streams?

The vegetated areas you see along streams are known as **riparian buffers** or **grow zones**. And guess what? These plantings of native trees, shrubs and grasses mean a whole lot when it comes to the health of our local waterways. Riparian buffers are a win for nature *and* people!

However, these ecosystems have largely disappeared from our streamsides – with natural systems being removed in favor of manicured landscapes. This has led to a decline in water quality and dwindling habitat for our native species. For the benefit of our streams, communities and wildlife species, it is important to protect these riparian buffers where they still exist and to restore them where they have been removed.

Throughout the Lehigh Valley, grow zones are taking root. They are among the most cost-effective, natural solutions for: improved water quality and quantity, flood and erosion control, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat and increased outdoor recreation opportunities.

### The Benefits of Riparian Buffers

These riparian buffers provide many important benefits to the stream and surrounding ecosystem:

- **Cooler temperatures and cover:** Trees along the stream offer shade that provide the cooler water temperatures necessary for native fish and other aquatic species. Overhanging branches and root systems create areas for fish to hide from predators along the streambanks.
- **Food and habitat:** Leaf litter and woody debris from riparian buffers provide food and cover for macroinvertebrates, or aquatic insects, in the stream, while larger woody debris offer fish habitat. These buffers also offer vital habitat for surface dwellers like mammals, birds, amphibians and insects.
- **Filter and absorb runoff:** Riparian buffers slow the flow of runoff, filtering pollutants before they can enter the stream and harm sensitive ecosystems. The vegetation also helps absorb excess water during storm events, recharging groundwater supplies and decreasing local flooding.

- **Prevent erosion:** The deeper root systems of trees, shrubs and understory vegetation help stabilize streambanks by holding the soil in place. This helps prevent erosion during storm events and keeps sediment from blanketing stream bottom habitat.
- **Natural character, outdoor recreation and cost savings:** Plantings along the stream create beauty and diversity in the landscape by adding color and character. They increase wildlife viewing and fishing opportunities, all while reducing the time and expenses associated with mowing and manicuring.

### **Who's Behind Buffers Where You Live?**

Wildlands Conservancy works with municipal and private landowners to plant these riparian buffers along local streams throughout the area. Through the support of our giving community, like-minded organizations, foundations and agencies, and a host of passionate landowners and community volunteers, Wildlands is able to forward these important plantings for the benefit of the whole Lehigh River watershed.

Look for these planting areas in your local parks to see the benefits in action, or contact us (<https://www.wildlandspa.org/contact-us/>) if you have need of plantings on your own property! Private landowners are an important source of buffer habitat and water quality improvements along streams in the Lehigh Valley.