

## **WATERFRONT YARD CARE FOR HEALTHY LAKES**

If there's one thing Roscommon County has, is a lot of lakefront living. With 3 large bodies of water, and a number of small lakes, protection of the aquatic environment should be of top priority to those living in Roscommon County or anywhere else with a similar landscape. So what can owners of waterfront property, especially those on septic systems, do to maximize the health of their favorite lake?

If your home has a septic system, be aware that a lakefront septic system will need more careful maintenance than a septic system in a land locked area. The high amount of ground water gives septic waste a direct route to the lakeshore. A poorly functioning septic system will allow bacteria and minerals to leach into the lake. Phosphorus coming from septic systems can cause excessive weed and algae growth. This makes the lake less enjoyable, threatens fish habitats, and creates a health risk for swimmers.

If the ground around your septic system is soggy and close to the lake, you may need to replace the system. Tests of the bacterial levels in the water, or a dye test to determine if color out down your drain ends up in the lake, can be done to determine just how much your septic system is leaching. Replacing your system is expensive, but worth while, as it will only increase your property value, and your safe enjoyment of the lake. Remember, if you've started living at your lakefront home year round, yet it was built for recreational use, check to see if the septic system can handle the increased usage. If you do need to build a new system, have it installed as far away from the lake as possible.

If your system is in good working order, there are quite a few things you can do to ensure it stays that way, such as having it pumped on a regular basis and conserving water so that the system is not over-filled. Also, the more plants and shrubs growing between your septic system and the lakeshore, the better the filtering of any leaking contaminants will be.

Another culprit for directing contaminated water into lakes is paved drive and walk ways close to the shore. Wherever water can not soak into the ground, it loses the opportunity to have pollution naturally filtered through the earth. Solid surfaces close to the lakeshore can cause water contaminated by oil, gas or other pollutants to run directly into the water. If you are creating pathways beside the lake, leave them un-paved so that rain water can drain into the soil. It is also a good idea to leave a buffer of wild plants between your yard and the waterfront. Lawn planted right up to the water increases shore erosion and water run-off problems. Deep-rooting aquatic plants such as bulrushes or other plants that are native to the area will help prevent shore erosion, and increase the filtering ability mentioned previously.

Finally, the fewer chemical pollutants you use in your home and yard, the fewer will end up in the lake. Avoid using phosphorus fertilizers and weed killers on your lake-front lawn. Instead, let the grass grow a little higher, and allow the clippings to remain spread on the lawn. These will provide natural fertilizer as they decompose, and will also help retain moisture due to their mulching action, keeping the lawn greener, longer. As for weeds, if you can't ignore them, try digging them out. A special tool, like a prong with a handle, can be purchased for digging out pesky roots such as dandelions. In your home, try using natural cleaning products such as vinegar and baking soda instead of more toxic chemicals.