

## Near wetlands? Better know your buffer rules

Published November 20 2005

If you live near a stream, wetlands, creek or river, you should not cut down a tree or remove lower vegetation without first checking with the environmental services division in your city or county.

In fact, there could be a hefty fine, up to \$10,000, if you illegally remove a tree within the 100-foot buffer designated by the 1988 Chesapeake Bay Protection Act. This applies to waterfront and marsh-front properties regardless of when the house was built or the lot was subdivided.

Why? Because those trees, shrubs and groundcovers make up what is called a "riparian buffer," a strip of land where root systems help filter pollutants before they enter waterways.

"The buffer is the last line of defense against pollutants, transported by surface storm water runoff, from reaching the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries," says Anna Drake, manager of environmental programs in York County's Department of Environmental and Development Services.

Organizations and individuals - homeowners, real estate agents and builders - who would like to learn more about the importance of riparian buffers and how they are managed under the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act can borrow a free 15-minute educational video made by Drake and her office. The video describes the makings of a functional riparian buffer and highlights how they relate to tidal wetlands and shorelines.

The take-home message from the video? Contact your local government before disturbing vegetation in the buffer, says Drake. To get a copy of the video, contact her office at 890-3752 or pick up one at any York County public library.

Have you planted a riparian buffer that's a good example of a healthy mix of trees, shrubs, grasses and groundcovers? Tell me about it; e-mail details to [kvanmullekom@dailypress.com](mailto:kvanmullekom@dailypress.com).

### THINGS TO DO

Here are some things to do in your yard, courtesy of North Carolina Cooperative Extension:

Save your geraniums. It can be expensive and sometimes difficult to replace geraniums, especially if you find them in a certain color one year and you can't find that same hue the next planting season. You can save geraniums from season to season without having to bring them into your living room. Take the plants out of their pot or the ground, shake all the soil off their roots and hang them upside down from the ceiling of your garage or basement. Just make sure the area is cool, about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. You can pick off the leaves as they decay.

When spring arrives again, you'll see new growth emerging on the old, shriveled stems. Those new buds tell you it's time to take down the geraniums, prune them back and repot the plants. Give them a week or two, then fertilize the plants so they can establish a new root system. Put the plants outdoors when the weather stabilizes and the soil is warm.

Get last tomatoes. If any green tomatoes on your vines are close to maturity size, bring them indoors to ripen. There are two key points to getting them to ripen. First, enclose them so the ethylene gas they produce stays around to ripen the tomato. Then, separate them so that one rotten tomato doesn't ruin the others around it.

To accomplish this, you can individually wrap the tomatoes in newspaper or place them in paper bags. Green tomatoes produce their own ethylene, but you can add ethylene by placing them with other fruit; apples and bananas both produce ethylene as they ripen.

Bringing in plants. Hopefully, any of your houseplants susceptible to frost damage are already indoors because they need to get inside before temperatures get below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, something we've already experienced this fall.

However, plants such as banana trees and elephant ears don't need to come in until after frost kills the foliage.

If you've brought your plants indoors and you're seeing insects in the soil, submerge the pots of soil in buckets of water - or a tub - to drown the pests. Let the pots drain thoroughly.

Still time to plant. November is still a good month to put in new plants, including spring-flowering bulbs. It's also an ideal time to transplant existing trees, shrubs and perennials.

Clean, clean, clean. A trashy garden - one filled with decaying and dead foliage - is as bad as a house overflowing with garbage. Leave that trash there and you'll have pests and

diseases you wish you had never met. Old foliage left on the ground is a prime breeding spot for fungal spores and other plant problems. Instead, keep your garden clean of fallen debris.

Perennial foliage can be cut back to the ground on plants such as cone flowers, but not on herbaceous perennials with hollow stems. Plants such as Joe-Pye weed, sage and Miss Huff lantana are susceptible to winter injury if water runs down the insides of the hollow stems; instead, prune them back in late February or early March. Also, the seed heads of many perennials provide winter food for birds, so leave them be.

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