



UI Extension Forestry Information Series

Riparian Zone Tree Plantings

Yvonne Carree Barkley and Ron Mahoney

Riparian zones are areas along or near a stream, river, or body of water; they are very important for wildlife habitat and water quality and add diversity to the landscape.

As interest in water quality and riparian zone management is increasing, many people are looking for tree species that grow well in areas that are periodically flooded. Tree species which improve fish and wildlife habitat and act as nutrient sinks are especially in demand. Wildlife species are very active in riparian zones. Food and cover can be provided depending on the species selected for planting. Fish benefit from overhanging trees which lower water temperatures by shading, and increase organic materials to the stream by leaf fall.

Trees are very effective nutrient filters that can modify some environmental impacts of agricultural practices. These trees will remove and store as much as 89% of the nutrients before they have a chance to enter into waterways. Periodic harvest of trees can then remove excess nutrients from the ecosystem. Removals also occur when nuts, fruits or vegetative material are consumed by wildlife or livestock. Where water quality is of concern landowners should know that hardwood tree species along stream courses and irrigation canals are more effective filters of excess nutrients than conifers and herbaceous plantings.

Below is a list of very flood tolerant and flood tolerant tree species. Most of these species have the ability to produce timber, wildlife, aesthetic and aquatic benefits.

Flood Tolerant Species are defined as trees that can withstand flooding for most of one growing season.

- American basswood
- Siberian elm

- cedar
- hackberry
- red maple
- silver maple
- bur oak
- Nuttall oak
- overcup oak
- pin oak
- swamp chestnut oak
- swamp white oak
- swamp red oak
- water oak
- persimmon
- sweetgum
- sycamore

Very Flood Tolerant Species are defined as trees that can withstand flooding for periods of two or more growing seasons.

- aspen
- bald cypress
- cottonwood
- green ash
- poplar
- willow

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About the Authors:

Yvonne Carree Barkley is an Extension Associate - Forestry and *Dr. Ron Mahoney* is an Extension Forester and Professor at the University of Idaho.

