



Productive Buffers

The purpose of this publication is to offer possible buffer plantings which could be **profitable and productive** in a buffer strip. Be aware that some cost share programs may not allow products to be sold from the buffer if it is still under the terms of the contract.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) is the lead agency for implementing the MN Buffer Law. County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) are the local contact agency for farmers and landowners. A complete review of the MN Buffer Law is at the BWSR web site:

<http://bwsr.state.mn.us/buffers/>

BACKGROUND

Governor Mark Dayton signed the Minnesota Buffer Law in the summer of 2015. This law designates an estimated 110,000 acres of land for water quality using buffer strips statewide. The law establishes new perennial vegetation buffers of up to 50 feet along rivers, streams, and ditches that will help filter out phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment. The new law provides flexibility and financial support for landowners to install and maintain buffers, and boost compliance with buffer laws across Minnesota. Alternative practices (other than buffers) may be accepted if they improve water quality.

"Buffer" means an area consisting of perennial vegetation, excluding invasive plants and noxious weeds, adjacent to all bodies of water within the state and that protects the water resources of the state from runoff pollution; stabilizes soils, shores, and banks; and protects or provides riparian corridors.

The width of a buffer must be measured from the top or crown of the bank. Where there is no defined bank, measurement must be from the edge of the normal water level.

Public waters – 50-foot average buffer width with a 30-foot minimum width.

Public ditches – 16.5-foot minimum width.

Or alternative practices (applies to both public waters and public ditches).

Dates to comply:

1. November 1, 2017, for public waters; and
2. November 1, 2018, for public drainage systems

PRODUCTIVE BUFFER PLANTING OPTIONS

Pollinator Friendly

Seed mixes of pollinator friendly forbs and grasses can be planted in buffers which will offer habitat and food to native bees and wasps, including honey bees. There may be specific pollinator planting grants and cost share programs available for these plantings. In the fall of the year, seed could also be harvested and sold for income from the buffer.

<http://www.xerces.org/pollinators-great-lakes-region/>

Native Seed Production

Native forb and grass seed is always a valuable commodity. Buffers can be planted to various species of native forbs and grasses that are in high demand. Late summer and fall harvest of these seeds is allowed as long as the planting is not disturbed.

<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/protecting/conservation/practices/grass.aspx>

Elderberry

Elderberry is becoming more well-known as a health food, juice and wine supplement. There is a MN Elderberry Coop, which members can sell their elderberries to for value-added products. Spacing is usually rows 10 feet apart and 4 to 6 feet within the row.

<http://minnesota-elderberry.coop/>
www.riverhillsharvest.com



Black Chokeberry or Aronia Berry



This shrub is becoming very popular as a health food which offers high levels of antioxidants. This shrub can be grown in the backyard as well as a field planting. Spacing is usually rows 10 feet apart and 4 to 6 feet within the row.

<http://midwestaronia.org/>

Hazelnut

Hazelnuts may offer value added products and are even popular as edible nuts. However, most of the hybrid hazelnuts lack consistency and each plant has different characteristics. Research trials are underway to develop methods to select and propagate the best plants for growers. Spacing is usually rows 10 feet apart and 4 to 6 feet within the row.

<http://midwesthazelnuts.org/>



Decorative Woody Florals

Woody florals are any woody plant, mainly shrubs that can be made into decorative arrangements either by the grower or flower business. Plants include curly willows, dogwoods, pussy willows and many more. Stems are usually harvested each year depending on the plant.

<http://www.nfs.unl.edu/documents/SpecialtyForest/growersguideweb2007.pdf>

Other Productive Buffer Options

Plums, Blackberry, Perennial Intermediate Wheatgrass

RENTING BUFFERS

The farmer or landowner may choose to rent the buffer to another farmer. An example may include a Beef/Dairy producer renting the forb/grass buffer to bale hay for winter feed. A beginning farmer rents the buffer to plant Black Chokeberry (Aronia Berry) shrubs to process berries into value added products like juices and jams. <http://sustainablefarmlease.org/>

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