

# The Watershed Association of Tellico Reservoir Plant a Riparian Garden

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*The photo above shows the demonstration riparian garden in Tellico Village. Note the swale in the middle one-third of the garden. It holds water from lawns allowing the plants time to absorb phosphorous, nitrogen and other harmful chemicals from entering the lake.*

The beauty and versatility of Tellico Lake and reservoir from Chilhowee Dam to Tellico Dam in Lenoir City is important to us all. The Watershed Association of Tellico Reservoir (WATeR) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting and improving the quality of this body of water and the streams and rivers that feed into it.

WATeR recognizes that growth of algae causing a “greening” effect in the reservoir is a present threat to water quality because algae can lead to the development of slime and the growth of unwanted plants at the shoreline. Clean

water is important to those who swim and fish in the reservoir and esthetically pleasing to recreational visitors who spend millions of dollars in our area. Property values are sustained by pristine waters and shorelines. Prevention is key! To protect the greening effect in the watershed, WATeR is enlisting the help of property owners around the lake to take action to prevent greening. One major solution is for lakefront homeowners to plant a “riparian garden” (a garden that exists alongside a river) on their property to reduce the flow of nitrogen, phosphorous and bug and weed chemicals into the Tellico Reservoir and damaging its water quality.

What does it do? An effective riparian buffer zone on the waterfront slows and absorbs rainwater runoff from the fertilized lawn above it. Plant roots in buffer zones take up nutrients off the lawn, and bacteria take up and metabolize pesticides in runoff from the lawn so that they do not enter the lake. The larger the size of the riparian zone, the greater the likelihood that it will be effective to absorb excess nutrients that run off from lawns, but even a small buffer zone with native plants and porous soil is preferable to lawn grass. The riparian zone can decrease the risk of soil erosion and also serve as an esthetically pleasing way to increase wildlife habitat.

Where can I see one? WATeR volunteers recently installed a demonstration riparian garden at the Rock Point boat dock in Rarity Bay. It was dedicated to Mary Bridges in a well-attended ceremony on October 28, 2019. A second demonstration garden was installed on the waterfront behind the Tanasi Clubhouse in Tellico Village, and will be dedicated on April 6<sup>th</sup> of this year.

A second problem is algae. Algal growth is increased by phosphate, and the major source of phosphate is fertilizer that is applied to, and runs off from, waterfront properties into the lake. The quantity of these negative nutrients or fertilizers and pollutants such as weed and bug killers increases each year due to the increase of homeowners in and around the Tellico Reservoir. A second solution to prevent greening is the use of low-phosphate fertilizers on lawns. Homeowners are encouraged to ask local lawn maintenance services and fertilizer suppliers to use and sell low or phosphate-free fertilizers.

Where can I get more information? Visit WATeR’s website at [www.tellicowater.org](http://www.tellicowater.org) or email [ihm23@aol.com](mailto:ihm23@aol.com) to request a consultation from a WATeR specialist because other conditions such as sun, shade and elevation can influence the design of your garden. Please visit either demonstration site. The kiosk has construction information and a list of native Tennessee plants used.