

By: Jody A. Thompson, Environmental Educator
Alabama Sea Grant/Auburn Marine Center

Streamside buffers can play a very important role in protecting water quality, providing habitat, and protecting homes from flood waters. According to the Center for Watershed Protection, a buffer is an area along a shoreline, wetland, or stream where development is restricted or prohibited, and the primary function is to physically protect and separate a stream, lake or wetland from future disturbance or encroachment. Buffers can also provide stormwater storage during floods, and remove pollutants, such as Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and sediment from stormwater.

Although a buffer width of 50-100 feet is considered optimal, as little as 12 feet can provide benefits including:

- stabilization of shorelines and creation of valuable waterfront fish and wildlife habitat
- absorption of excess water from storms and protection from flooding
- prevention of erosion by holding the soil in place, absorbing wave energy and slowing stormwater runoff
- protection of water quality by trapping sediments and taking up nutrients and other pollutants from stormwater runoff.

By planting native vegetation along your waterfront, you can help protect water quality. This can be done as simply as establishing a “no-mow” zone at the water’s edge. For

more information on native plants appropriate for your area, contact your County Extension office.