

# Living in Town

A watershed is an area of land drained by a waterbody like a stream, river, or lake. The water in the waterbody is directly affected by what happens on the land in the watershed. You are always in a watershed, so what you do on the land affects a waterbody near you, even if it is not visible from where you are.

Unsustainable land uses can pollute a stream, leaving it shallow, hot, full of sediment and algae, and with eroding banks. A degraded stream can increase the cost of producing drinking water, cannot be a good home to fish, and unstable banks can make the stream a hazard. One landowner's actions can cause problems for both upstream and downstream neighbors. It is in your power to positively impact the waterbodies near you.

According to conservationist Kristine Tompkins, "You can't protect a place unless you understand it. You can't know a place unless you love it." Take young people to a stream and allow them to explore and play. Understanding, knowing, and loving a place requires repeated outdoor experiences. Establishing a connection with nature is critical to its long-term protection.



## Become a Blue Thumb Volunteer!

Adopt a stream near you!

To find out more about upcoming trainings:  
[www.bluethumbok.com](http://www.bluethumbok.com)



email: [bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov](mailto:bluethumb@conservation.ok.gov)

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## Protecting Streams and Rivers

Living in an urban area has many benefits. Generally you are close to work, school, shopping, and a variety of entertainment opportunities. One of those entertainment opportunities might be spending time in a park enjoying the outdoors.



The more urban an area, the greater the chance for impact on the streams that run through it. However, there are lots of things that can be done to improve our urban streams. For example, the stream on the left, in a city park, has had trees and other vegetation removed, allowing soil and other pollution to enter the creek. In contrast, the stream on the right (also in an urban area) has stable banks and is covered in vegetation.



Oklahoma Blue  
Thumb Water  
Quality Education  
Program

"Stream Protection  
Through Education"

# Being a Good Steward

Think of the many neighborhoods that exist across our country. Many people don't realize that what they do to their yard and what they let leak onto driveways and roads has an effect on their community's waterways. Good management of your property makes a healthier environment for all creatures, both terrestrial and aquatic.

How a city manages its land also has an effect on the environment. When herbicides and pesticides are applied inappropriately, these chemicals can be washed into nearby streams, affecting aquatic creatures. Mowing vegetation too short reduces shade and the ability of vegetation to absorb pollutants. Plants reduce erosion, roots stabilize banks, and stems and leaves offer relief from raindrop impacts.

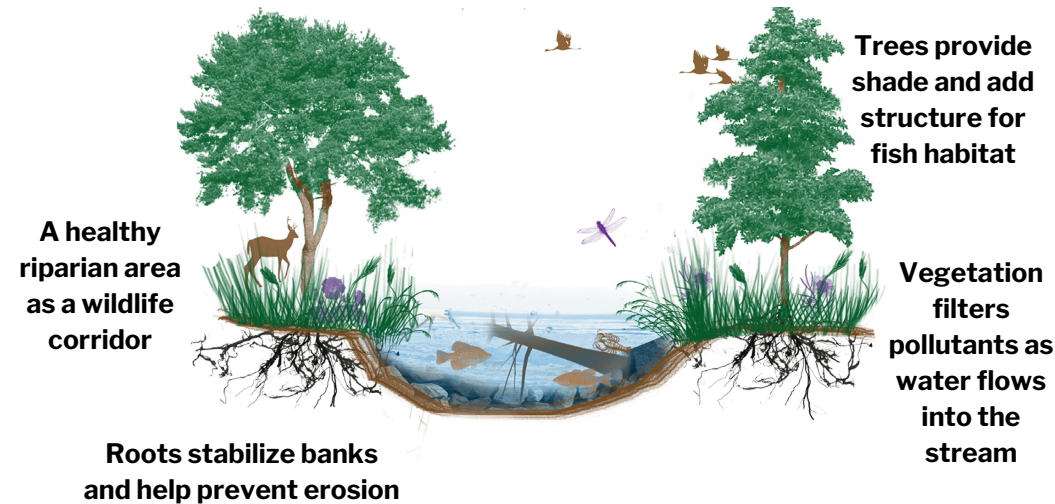
Some things you can do in your yard include:

- **leave riparian areas undisturbed**
  - don't mow to the edge and allow trees to grow, protecting streambanks and filtering pollutants
  - use a mulching mower
  - compost or recycle your trimming/clippings/leaves
  - allow vegetation to grow up a bit to improve the roots and soil (and water) health
- **limit your use of pesticides and herbicides**
  - look for alternatives before applying chemicals to your lawn, if needed
  - read and follow label directions
  - never apply chemicals if rain is predicted
- **include native plants in your landscaping**
  - native plants are drought tolerant, pest resistant, have deep roots, and help bees, birds, and butterflies
- **install rain barrels or rain gardens**
  - visit with your local conservation district to learn about rainwater harvesting and reducing runoff
- **test your soil**
  - before applying fertilizer, have your soil tested at your local OSU Extension Office

# Riparian Area

## Why it Matters

A **healthy riparian area** provides many benefits to both the aquatic and terrestrial areas around a stream. When you maintain a healthy riparian area, you provide beneficial services to your upstream and downstream neighbors.



An **unhealthy/missing riparian area** causes many problems in a stream. When you remove all vegetation from the banks, it can have negative effects on your upstream and downstream neighbors.

