

## Improving Lake Water Quality -- Trees

“If I never see another tree, it will be too soon!”

It is not difficult to hear this sentiment expressed every autumn. Homeowners are tired of raking, mulching and generally disposing of leaves from the trees in their yards. But like most pain, the memory will fade by spring and once again we will anticipate the trees bursting with leaves. What effect do these trees have, not only the quality of water in our lake, but on our very lives?

Trees have been called “the lungs of the planet”. They breathe in carbon dioxide and breathe out oxygen which improves the quality of our air. The canopy of their leaves breaks the force of rain as it falls. This slows the runoff of water. The longer water has to soak into the ground, the less fertilizer and chemicals are carried into the lake. It also reduces soil erosion and sediment in the lake -- soil that may eventually have to be dredged at the expense of the property owners.

Shade trees can reduce the use of air conditioners by up to 30% in the summer. A screen of evergreens on the windward side of your home can cut heating costs in the winter. These same trees will provide privacy and reduce noise pollution as they absorb and block sound. They will also screen out unwanted views.

Through long winter days here at the lake, bird-watching is an ongoing source of entertainment. A feeder hung from the bough of a tree – and a bird book for identification purposes next to the window – provide a pleasant occupation for adults and children alike. Evergreen trees are a “bird hotel” on snowy winter nights. Migrating birds appear in the spring, and a tree becomes a launching site for insect control as well as a nesting place to raise their young. The more birds we encourage, the less flies and mosquitoes we will have.

If the fish at the lake had a vote, they would encourage us to plant more trees and shrubs lakeside. On sunny summer days, fish like to hang out in the shade of overhanging greenery. Leaves which fall from these trees also feed insects and other organisms which in turn feed the fish. The roots or dead branches from these trees which extend into the water provide underwater structure for the fish – a base from which to ambush prey and/or a place to hide from our sharp-eyed eagles and ospreys. .

Without trees, the landscape is sterile. Cities have recognized this and plant trees, not just to reduce the “heat island” effect of sun beating on pavement and concrete buildings, but to enhance the beauty of the area. Trees convey a sense of peace and security. Recent research has shown that stays for post-op patients in hospitals is shortened for those in rooms with a view of trees.

So ..... back to those leaves. Leaves chopped and shredded by mowers actually make excellent winter mulch for your perennials and trees. Some leaves chopped back onto your lawn actually provide nutrients and will reduce the amount of fertilizer you need.

Or you can just decide that this comes under the heading of “there is no such thing as a free lunch” ..... for the benefits that trees provide, we have to put up with leaves in the fall.