

Buffer Zones

The best protection for a stream is to be surrounded with a good buffer area of woods, shrubs, wetlands, and grasses to intercept contaminated runoff before it reaches the water. The less “groomed” this buffer area is, the more it can perform its normal functions, which include:

- Protecting banks from erosion
- Storing water and filtering it to ground water
- Removing sediment and excess nutrients
- Shading and cooling the stream
- Providing organic debris for the stream’s food chain
- Filtering out pollutants

Protect stream banks on your property:

- Ideally the buffers should consist of a variety of plants and extend for *a minimum* of 25 feet on each side of the stream depending on the soils and slope. Steep-banked streams, such as the Peapack Brook, require the hearty protection of shrubs and trees that provide shade, erosion control, temperature regulation and food sources for aquatic wildlife.
- Refrain from applying chemicals in this area to avoid polluting the waterway.
- A tree that falls into the stream provides cover and shade for fish and other stream inhabitants. Natural dams of branches and twigs capture organic debris and provide a rich feeding area for aquatic creatures, however snags and blockages that cause dangerous flooding or erosion may have to be cleared.
- Refrain from destructive activities, such as the use of heavy equipment, in the riparian area.

- Clean up human-derived debris that is caught within the vegetation before it enters the stream.
- Discuss stream buffer management and available funding for such programs with URWA.