

# Nature Talks

Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District

Nature Talks  
February 2021

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Sherburne  
**SWCD**

**Now ORDER ONLINE** **Tree Sale** **SWCD TREE SALE**  
Spreading roots to promote a greener Sherburne County

The Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District is holding its annual tree sale to encourage tree planting in Sherburne County. The SWCD is now accepting online tree orders.

Bare root seedlings are easy to plant, grow quickly and come in bundles of 25. Many of the species being offered provide food and shelter for birds and wildlife year round. Additionally, trees can increase the value of your property and conserve energy by shading your house in summer and sheltering it from cold winds in winter. Tree orders will be available for pick-up April 30 - May 1 at our office location on Jackson Ave in Elk River. Stock is limited and orders are entered on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Order your trees today at:

<https://www.sherburneswcd.org/tree-sale-store.html#/>



## What is a Buffer and Who Needs One?

A buffer is vegetated land adjacent to a stream, river, ditch, lake or wetland. Who needs one? Anyone adjacent to a stream, river, ditch, lake, or wetland. Buffers help filter out contaminants such as phosphorus, nitrogen, bacteria, and sediment from lawns, pastures, and agricultural fields so they don't reach our water sources; they are an important conservation practice to help keep water clean. Studies by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency show that buffers are critical to protecting and restoring water quality and healthy aquatic life, natural stream functions and aquatic habitat due to their immediate proximity to the water.

What should you plant? Native, water loving, species are best to not only help clean our water but also to provide important habitat and pollinator resources. If you already have non-native species, remember to let it grow and pull back any fertilizer or disturbance. For any questions regarding buffers or installing them on your property, please contact the Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District 763-220-3434.



## Winter Salt Use And Our Waterbodies

Another winter season has arrived with snow and ice abundant yet again this year. The ice fishing bite is on, sledding hills are bustling, and of course our daily commutes are planned ahead with much consideration given to the weather forecast. With the arrival of winter, residents and local municipalities are forced to manage the sidewalks, driveways and roads we travel on to reduce snow and ice accumulation. Our tools include chloride (salt) products, snow blowers, ATVs and trucks with plow blades, and also the good old fashioned shovel. It is a seemingly never-ending battle sometimes!

While salt products are effective at melting the accumulating ice and keeping our roads and driveways safe, they have an unintended impact on our waters. Minnesota has some of the most abundant freshwater lakes and streams in the United States, but when salt reaches our waterbodies it can pollute the waters relatively easy; it takes only one teaspoon of salt to pollute five gallons of water! Because salt dissolves so easily in water, this is a permanent form of pollution that is very difficult to address. Even infiltration through the ground is not an effective way to remove salt from water. So when salt enters a lake, it can gradually accumulate and increase the salinity of that waterbody. That of course can lead to a detrimental state for the freshwater fish, plants and other organisms that call the lake their home. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) has a great amount of additional information on their website: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/chloride-101>.



### What can we do to address this problem?

**There are several things you and I can do to prevent over-salting of our lakes and streams:**

- Use less salt – more salt does not equate to more or faster melting.
  - Experts say less than 4lbs of salt can be applied to 1,000 square feet effectively (3-inch space between granules).
  - 1lb of salt is the equivalent of a 12-ounce coffee mug.
- Remove snow and ice manually – the more you remove, the less salt you will need to be applied.
- Sweep up excess salt visible on a dry sidewalk/driveway. If possible, re-use the salt.
- Do not apply salt below 15°F – most salt products will not work below this temperature.
- If your business hires a contractor for snow removal / de-icing, choose a certified Smart Salt contractor.
  - Certified contractors have attended trainings on smart salt applications hosted by the MPCA.
  - The Smart Salt training, and certified contractors, can be found here:

<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/water/hire-certified-applicator>

- For homeowners, evaluate your water softener to increase its efficiency
- The MPCA has guidance for water softeners here: <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/skinny-water-softeners>

**For more information on salt and our waterbodies, visit the MPCA webpages above or contact [Dan Cibulka](#) at the SWCD office.**

## The True Value Of Windbreaks



Windbreaks are often an overlooked aspect of tree planting on the landscape, but they provide many benefits to both wildlife and humans. One type of wind break is a living snow fence. Living snow fences are especially important this time of year when blowing snow across roads can become a dangerous problem. Not only does the windbreak protect the people on the road, it also helps the farmer by more evenly spreading the snow across the field which in turn beneficially increases springtime soil moisture. Then, during the summer, these same windbreaks also help mitigate the effects of wind erosion. Where blowing snow isn't an issue, living fences provide many services as well. They provide a visual screen to roads (or nosy neighbors), decrease noise levels, and help reduce livestock odors. Additionally, they provide wildlife habitat and increase bee populations; especially when flowering tree/shrub species are added to the planting. Overall, windbreaks/living fences are a great way to improve the aesthetics of a property, decrease the dangerous effects of blowing snow, provide visual and auditory privacy, increase your property value, and ultimately a great way to leave a legacy for generations to come.



### Considerations before you start:

- Purpose of the planting (wind break, privacy, habitat, etc.)
- Tree/shrub species for your soil type find your soil type here: <https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/WebSoilSurvey.aspx>
- Number of rows to meet the goal of the project
- Spacing within and between the rows for optimal plant health

For more information please contact

David Wick with the SWCD at 763-220-3434 ext.102

or Kelly Bistodeau with the USDA/NRCS at 763-614-2927

## Citizen Pruner Program Training

The Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District and the cities of Becker, Big Lake, Clear Lake, Elk River, Princeton, and Zimmerman have partnered with the University of Minnesota Forest Resources Department on the Citizen Pruners program since 2014. Citizen Pruners are trained in tree identification, biology, and pruning techniques. Tree pruning requires not only an understanding of how to prune but also an understanding of the tree's biology to prevent the spread of certain diseases. If you enjoy being outdoors, love trees and your community, this is an opportunity for you to get involved in your urban forest. Course material will be taught by University of Minnesota Forest Resources Department staff alongside the Sherburne Soil & Water Conservation District.

This training consists of 2 days, the first being a 1 ½ hour online zoom presentation followed with an in-person hands on training. In person groups are limited to 5 participants and masks will be required.

### Citizen Pruner Training

March 5th 3-4:30pm – Virtual Zoom session

March 6th 8:30-11:30am or 1:30-4:30pm  
In-person hands on training

Location:

Elk River Library  
13065 Orono Parkway NW  
Elk River, MN 55330

[Registration](#)



## Pollinator Habitat in Yards and Gardens

When most individuals think of pollinator habitat, they imagine a rolling prairie filled with hundreds of different flowers and grasses, bees buzzing and butterflies fluttering. What about your yard? Did you know pollinator habitat can easily be incorporated into any home landscape? You certainly don't need a 10-acre property to start providing habitat! There are a few things pollinators need in order to thrive, which is not unlike what us humans need: food, shelter, water.



The main goal when trying to provide enough pollen and nectar sources is to have at least 3 flowers blooming during each season (expect winter of course). Utilizing native plants is recommended because they provide the most nutritious resources. Shelter is another important resource that is usually overlooked when it comes to planning for pollinators, many of our native solitary bees (400+ species!) require specialized nesting sites.

Leaving some areas "messy" allows for nesting such as bare ground, standing plant stems, and wood piles.

By making a few small changes in your yard, you can help increase important habitat for some of our at-risk pollinator species like the monarch butterfly or the rusty patched bumblebee. Contact our office today for more information.

**Plant examples for each season:**

Spring	Summer	Fall
Violet spp.	Butterflyweed	Zig Zag Goldenrod
Prairie Smoke	Blazingstar spp.	Gray Goldenrod
Pasque Flower	Purple Prairie Clover	Showy Goldenrod
Columbine	Narrow Leaved Coneflower	Large Leaf Aster
Slender Penstemon	Blue Giant Hyssop	Sky Blue Aster
Wild Lupine	White Wild Indigo	Aromatic Aster

*Resources:*

Minnesota Wildflowers - <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info>

MN DNR Native Nursery List - <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/gardens/nativeplants/suppliers.html>

Planting for Pollinators Design Guide (BWSR) - <http://bwsr.state.mn.us/residential-pollinator-habitat>

## Conservation Comedy

What kind of flowers should you NOT give on Valentine's Day?



Cauliflower

## Ask our legislators to support SWCD capacity funding



Sherburne Soil and Water Conservation District provides conservation information, support, and program management for landowners and other local units of government. We are the technical experts and “boots on the ground” who understand our community’s needs and help landowners navigate conservation programs from start to finish.

SWCDs are funded primarily through the state legislature through the Board of Water and Soil Resources. If Minnesota wants to continue to help landowners interested in voluntary conservation projects, it needs to continue to fund SWCDs. Our state legislators will determine how to fund SWCDs this legislative session, which has been done through the state’s Clean Water Fund in recent years. The Clean Water Fund has proven to be a crucial funding stream for Sherburne SWCD.

As you probably know, the SWCD has professional staff with the ability to address any potential resource concern in the county.

The district’s staff works with and guides landowners to assess and protect water quality, address erosion concerns, improve wildlife habitat, increase forest resiliency, improve pastureland health, and increase the value and health of soil conditions across the county. The district has been recognized for superior quality in these areas as well as overseeing a strong natural resource education program which are designed for both our adult landowners as well as our young “future landowners”. The strength and diversity of our programs led to our designation of Minnesota’s “SWCD of the Year” in 2018 by the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (MASWCD).

## SWCD Poster Contest



Each year the SWCD hosts a poster contest for 5th grade students throughout the County. The students are presented with a theme in which they are to design a poster around. The theme for 2021 is “Healthy Forests=Healthy Communities.” The purpose of this contest is to provide students with a creative way to gain a better appreciation for the environment. Prizes are awarded to the top 4 posters. Area 5th grade teachers, homeschool parents or Co-op’s interested in participating should contact Franny at [fgerde@sherburneswcd.org](mailto:fgerde@sherburneswcd.org). *Good luck students!*

## Funding Opportunities Available for Farmers

CRP Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 2021 enrollment will begin on January 4, 2021 and ends February 12, 2021. This will be for any new land or expiring land currently enrolled into CRP. CRP Grasslands signup will start March 15, 2021 through April 23, 2021 and Continuous CRP signup will be from April 1, 2021 through August 6, 2021 for specific water quality practices only. Through CRP, farmers and ranchers establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. CRP general signup is held annually. The competitive general signup includes increased opportunities for enrollment of wildlife habitat through the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative. For more information on CRP, visit [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov) or contact your local FSA office at 763-241-1150.

NRCS’s Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) has an application deadline of March 26th, 2021. The CSP program is a wonderful way for land managers to take their operation to the next level of conservation. After an assessment of current operations, NRCS may be able to offer financial assistance for performing above and beyond activities that benefit (but not limited to) soil quality, wildlife habitat, and water quality. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis and funding is limited. Contact your local NRCS service center today for more information.