

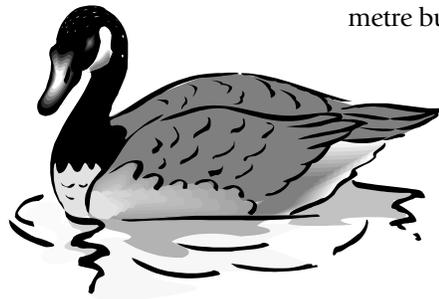
Geese and your Shoreline Property

For many cottagers, the thought of a flock of Canada Geese making a home out of their shoreline is not a desirable one. Goose droppings, safety hazards caused by flocks of geese, and damaged shorelines are just some of the negative results of problem geese.

There are a number of ways to prevent geese from making your waterfront property their home, and most ways are environmentally friendly and won't harm the geese.

Don't feed the geese

Canada geese *do not* need to be fed. There are plenty of natural sources of foods for them to eat. Feeding geese concentrates them near roads and areas of heavy human use, which can cause safety hazards. Geese also may become accustomed to human contact and more aggressive toward people.



Vegetation along a shoreline needs to be about 60 cm (24 inches) high, and dense enough to keep geese from seeing through it. Ideally the barrier should be at least 7.5 metres (25 feet) deep, with a narrow S-shaped path so people can get to the water's edge without the path being noticeable. However, a one- to two-metre buffer zone is better than none at all. Natural shoreline areas also act as filtering buffers, removing pollutants and excess nutrients from runoff going into the lake.

Geese also congregate at night in large open fields such as golf courses – so more of these developments mean more goose-friendly habitat.

Goose-proofing your yard

The easiest way to discourage geese before they get established in an area is to encourage shore habitats that do not make it easy for them to move from the water to the shore.

Geese are attracted to flat, open areas they can get to easily, like a well-manicured lawn that goes right to the shoreline. They enjoy the lush young shoots of fertilized, heavily watered grass. Letting grass grow to higher lengths, reducing or eliminating fertilizer application (See our Fact Sheet on Aquatic Plants) and reducing watering will make your lawn less attractive to the geese.

For the most part, Canada Geese avoid feeding, nesting and congregating in areas where tall vegetation blocks the view of surrounding areas and their escape route.

For a low-maintenance shoreline option that is less appealing to geese, you can choose from a variety of attractive native groundcovers. See the Green-Up Fact Sheet called "Restoring Healthy Shorelines."

If you would still prefer to have some lawn between you and your lake, you can use a mixture of warm season grasses like switch grass, bluestems, wheat grass, and Indian grass combined with wildflowers – letting it grow to its full height. Using a combination like this requires much less maintenance and can be appealing if you use the combinations to blend with the natural contours of your yard.

Taller species of native trees can also be used in combination with grasses and shrubs to screen the shoreline. Make sure the trees are spaced properly to allow for their mature size. (See Green Up's Fact Sheet on Choosing the Right Tree.)

Work with your neighbours

If you are planning on naturalizing your shoreline, talk with your neighbours before you start. With proper coordination, the population of geese should shift away from your shared waterfront, towards a more suitable habitat.

More information

For more information on discouraging geese, or any other shoreline-related issues, please contact Peterborough Green-Up at (705) 745-3238 or visit the Green-Up website at www.greenup.on.ca.

Prevent an itch

Increased numbers of geese and other waterfowl in a lake area may lead to increased cases of swimmer's itch.

Swimmer's itch is a skin rash caused by a parasite (schistosomes) which ordinarily infect birds, semi-aquatic mammals, and snails. Common grackles, red-winged blackbirds, ducks, geese, swans, muskrats and moles have been found to carry the parasite. As part of their developmental life-cycle, these parasites are released from infected snails, migrate through the water, and are capable of penetrating the skin of humans. After penetration, these parasites remain in the skin and die but can cause an allergic reaction in some people. The parasite does not mature, reproduce or cause any permanent infection in humans.

If you are swimming or wading in water known to carry swimmer's itch, toweling off briskly instead of letting the water evaporate from your skin can help prevent a rash from developing.

The effects of swimmer's itch happen almost immediately as you leave the water and your skin begins to dry. There is a tingling feeling that results from schistosomes burrowing into your skin. As they die off and your skin reacts there will be pinpoint-sized red spots that soon develop into a rash. Depending on your level of sensitivity and exposure, this rash can range from mild to quite severe. The rash and itch will usually last two to five days, possibly as long as two weeks for more severe cases. Re-exposure to the parasite might cause a more severe allergic reaction.

There is no treatment required and no real danger; the only concern being a chance of infection from too much scratching. If required, an application of anti-itch medication such as calamine lotion, or a bath in lukewarm water containing three tablespoons of baking soda may soothe the itch. A cool compress may also help, and at bedtime it may be helpful to take an antihistamine.

Swimmer's Itch
Life Cycle

