

Living by Water: Your Seasonal Guide

Do you live by a lake, river or stream? Do you own a cottage near water? Protect your investment and the environment. Use this seasonal guide for maintaining your waterfront property.

FALL

Plan for Runoff

- Check your runoff control systems in anticipation of spring runoff. Check how drainage systems are working by walking your property during a rainstorm.
- Install any needed runoff control devices.
- Clear drainage ditches, swales and culvert ends of sediment, rocks and other debris that could block the flow of water.
- Clear eavestroughs and downspouts of debris.
- Clean out silt deposits along driveway runoff logs.
- Check that any water surge deflectors are in place.

Docks

- Weigh the pros and cons of wintering your dock on shore. Talk to neighbours to learn about winter conditions. Beaching your dock can help prolong its life and protect it from being buffeted by winter storms or squeezed by ice. However, the process of dragging it ashore may create wear and tear each time you move it, and damage your shoreline.

Plan for Snow Removal

- Designate areas for piling snow that will minimize interference with spring runoff, to avoid any possible flooding problems in the spring.
- Stake and mark any trees, shrubs, large rocks, runoff logs or other objects that could be damaged by snow removal equipment, or could damage your plough or snowblower.
- If heavy snow build-up on roofs or overhangs is a concern, investigate ways to reinforce the roof, or make arrangements to have the snow removed during the winter.

Wildlife

- Avoid negative encounters with wildlife by keeping them out of your home.

- Block all means of entry for insects, rodents and bats via foundations, porches and steps; through doors and windows; holes in roofs or eaves; cracks in floors, ceilings or walls; and through access points for wires and pipes.
- Discourage contact; trim tree limbs that touch the roof or walls of your home. Store firewood away from main buildings or in a special shelter. Use yellow light bulbs in all outside light fixtures – insects will be less attracted to your house at night.
- Keep food away. Use animal-proof garbage cans, keep pet food inside, and keep barbecue equipment clean and in a secure area. Do not put meat, bones, dairy products, fats or cooked grains in your compost.

Fall Leaves

- Compost leaves or use a mulching mower. Don't dump over banks or bluff edges into ravines or the water.

Plumbing

- Make sure that water pipes, pumps and outside faucets are either well insulated or drained so they can withstand the cold temperatures of your area.
- Protect unheated crawl spaces. If necessary, insulate footings.

WINTER

Septic Systems

- Prevent compaction of snow on your leaching bed (e.g. by snowmobiles). Undisturbed snow cover provides good insulation; compacted snow melts slowly and can saturate your bed.

Winter Traction

- For icy surfaces, use inexpensive sand, grit, kitty litter, saw dust or cinders. It only takes a thin layer of any of these products, scattered down your driveway or walkway to provide traction.
- Reduce your use of salt (chloride-based de-icers) and use de-icers that contain calcium magnesium acetate or potassium acetate.

Garbage on Ice

- To help prevent garbage and other debris left behind by visitors from freezing into ice on rivers and lakes, join forces with a few neighbours to create a Citizen's Patrol to monitor ice and speak to visitors about garbage.
- Plan a shoreline clean-up early in the spring to help protect nesting shorebirds.

Winter Recreation

- Take care when accessing a frozen lake for skating, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling or tobogganing. Use your summer access trail, rather than direct paths over snow. Even through the covering of ice and snow, vegetation and bank structure can be damaged by winter traffic.

Wells and Pumps

- In cold areas, use a light or heat lamp in an outside pumphouse to keep the pump from freezing.
- If you have a sump pump to deal with water in the basement, keep valuables off the floor, on shelves, or on wooden blocks, especially if you leave your house unattended.

SPRING

High Water

- Prepare in the fall to manage spring runoff. Even in low snow areas, meltwater from upstream may add to runoff through your property.

Septic Systems

- Conserve water to reduce the volume going into your septic leaching bed. High spring water tables and saturated ground may reduce the effectiveness of your system.
- If you suspect that the water table is higher than your septic leaching bed, contain a septic inspector. You could be contaminating surface water.
- Pump your tank late in the summer. If you pump when the water table is high, the empty tank could float up.

Flood Preparedness

- Your local Conservation Authority will likely have maps that can identify if you are in a flood risk area. If your home or property is at risk from imminent flooding contact your municipality or local emergency services for assistance.

Spring Mud

- Avoid using a muddy driveway. Rake out ruts before they dry and harden.
- Use planks or boards to create temporary boardwalks. This saves compacting the soil and helps keep mud out of your house and car.

Docks

- Hold off putting docks into the water until ground conditions have hardened, to prevent damage to the shoreline.

Spring Clean-up

- Remove human-made garbage; it can harm wildlife and their habitat, interfere with your recreation and it's ugly! But leave nature's debris; logs, branches and trees that have washed up on your shoreline or beach. Resist collecting them for firewood – they are essential to protecting your shoreline from erosion.

SUMMER

Drought

- If your well is at risk of failure during dry spells, minimize water use and supplement with other sources such as rainwater collection.
- Install a drip irrigation or soaker hose system; it allows water to seep slowly into the ground, reducing evaporation and preventing runoff.
- Use a thick layer of mulch, like straw or shredded leaves, to reduce watering.

Summer Recreation

- Mark where the water is safe for swimming, and be mindful of swift currents and undertows. Keep a reach pole and personal flotation devices handy for rescues.
- Keep fires small, avoid burning beach driftwood that may be protecting your shoreline from erosion, and don't burn treated or painted wood.
- To avoid swimmer's itch, apply waterproof suntan lotion and towel off vigorously immediately after swimming.

Low Water

- If you draw from a water body, check to make sure that the intake pipe extends well past the low water mark or below the lowest stream flow level.
- Move a floating dock out as water levels drop, to avoid being suddenly stuck high and dry!

Algal Blooms

- Nutrients from fertilizer runoff or septic leaching can make still waters more susceptible to algal growth. In hot, calm weather, blue-green algae can “bloom” in huge numbers and may be toxic to animals or people.
- Avoid water contaminated with blue-green algae. Do not drink it (boiling won’t remove the toxins), shower or do laundry with it, or swim in it. Keep your pets away from the water and do not eat fish caught in these waters.
- Stay away from the water until it’s been tested and declared safe to drink or swim in.

This information originally appeared in *On the Living Edge: Your Handbook for Waterfront Living*, by Sarah Kipp and Clive Calloway, as part of the Living by Water project. www.livingbywater.ca