



The Importance of Fringing Vegetation

A comprehension exercise.

Curriculum Links: Science: (Communicating Scientifically, Life & Living)
English: (Reading)

Outcomes: Students will:

- understand the importance of native vegetation in relation to streams and wetlands
- read to gain information.

Class Activity:

- Students read the information below and answer the questions, using full sentence answers.

The Importance of Fringing Vegetation

A very important feature of streams and wetlands is the native vegetation growing on the edge. This is called the riparian or fringing vegetation. The vegetation is very important to the health of the stream or wetland. It is important that the vegetation is native to the area and not a weed introduced from another country or part of Australia.

The vegetation helps to control erosion of the banks of the stream or wetland. The roots of the trees, shrubs and rushes hold the soil together so that it doesn't get washed away. The vegetation also slows down the water flow so that the water is less able to cause erosion.

The leaves from the fringing vegetation fall into the water and form an important part of the food web. Some macroinvertebrates feed on the leaves and others feed on the bacteria and fungi that cause the leaves to decay.

If the fringing vegetation is not native it changes the food web. Many introduced plants have soft leaves that decompose very quickly. Many are deciduous and drop all their leaves in autumn. This is very different to native plants. Native plants have hard, waxy leaves that decompose very slowly. They only drop some of their leaves and they do this all year round. Native plants supply a steady stream of leaves to the food web all year round whereas introduced plants supply a big flush of leaves in autumn. This is too much for the macroinvertebrates to use. The excess leaves pollute the water.

Fringing vegetation can also provide food directly. This can be in the form of fallen insects that have been blown from leaves and blossoms onto the water surface. This provides a rich harvest for spiders and fish.

The vegetation shades the water and keeps the temperature of the water low. This is very important for all the animals that live in the water as many of them cannot survive in high water temperatures. Keeping the water temperatures down also reduces the risk of algal blooms.

The fringing vegetation provides habitat for many types of animals. Spiders, insects, frogs, lizards and birds live in the vegetation around the water. Fallen trees and branches from the fringing vegetation provide habitat within the stream or wetland.





Comprehension questions:

1. What is the vegetation on the edge of streams and wetlands called?

- a) _____
- b) _____

2. How does the vegetation help to control erosion of the banks of the stream or wetland?

3. What are the benefits of the fringing vegetation shading the water in the stream?

4. What animals live in the riparian vegetation?

5. How does the fringing vegetation provide food for macroinvertebrates?

6. Are the leaves of native plants:

- a) Soft and quick to decompose; or
- b) Hard and waxy and slow to decompose?

7. Is it better for the food web to have native plants or introduced deciduous plants around the stream? Why?
