



RIVERINE PLANTING GUIDE

GRANTS FOR GRASS - TIER 1

Properties directly adjacent to or within the riparian corridor of the Big Wood River or its tributaries. Projects focus on floodplain reconnection, bank stabilization, native riparian buffers, and erosion reduction.



WHAT IS THIS GUIDE?

This guide is designed for landowners, restoration partners, and community members whose properties are directly on or adjacent to the Big Wood River or its tributaries.

It provides a focused framework for selecting, installing, and maintaining native plants that restore the ecological function of the river corridor, from the water's edge to the floodplain bench.

WHO SHOULD USE IT?

Use this guide if your property:

- Borders the Big Wood River or a tributary
- Includes a streambank, floodplain, or wetland area
- Has been approved for a Grants for Grass Tier 1 award
- Is being considered for riparian restoration

PURPOSE & OVERVIEW

The Big Wood River corridor is one of south-central Idaho's most ecologically vital systems. Its banks, floodplains, and adjacent uplands support clean water, native fish, migratory birds, pollinators, and a full spectrum of wildlife that depend on healthy, connected riparian habitat.

Riverine plantings — native species established on streambanks and floodplains — are among the highest-impact restoration actions a landowner can take. They reduce erosion, filter agricultural and urban runoff, reconnect floodplain function, shade and cool the water for native trout, and create structural habitat that simply cannot be replicated by non-native or ornamental alternatives.

This guide focuses on the native plants best suited to Tier 1 Riverine conditions: areas with consistent soil moisture, periodic flooding, and direct contact with or proximity to the river channel.

RIVERINE AREA OF WORK

What Makes Riverine Sites Distinct

Riverine properties experience dynamic conditions — flooding, shifting soils, seasonal drought, and fluctuating water tables. Plants must be resilient to all of it.

Successful riverine species are not simply "wet" plants but are adapted to survive drought between flood events, to anchor banks against high-velocity flows, and to recover quickly from disturbance.

The Role of Tier 1 Properties

Properties directly adjacent to the river represent the front line of watershed restoration. Even a modest planting, 500 to 2,000 square feet of native streamside vegetation, can meaningfully reduce bank erosion, intercept runoff, and expand connected habitat along the corridor.

ECOLOGICAL GOALS

- Stabilize and protect streambanks from erosion
- Filter surface runoff before it enters the river
- Restore native plant communities along the corridor
- Reconnect floodplain hydrology and reduce flood peaks
- Provide nesting, foraging, and corridor habitat for wildlife
- Support aquatic habitat through bank shading and wood input
- Establish a foundation for long-term watershed health

BEFORE YOU PLANT

Remove Invasives First

Russian olive, tamarisk (saltcedar), Canada thistle, and other invasive species are aggressive competitors that degrade riparian habitat. Removing them before or alongside native plantings is essential.

Contact Idaho Invasive Species Council (idahoinvasives.org) or Blaine County Weed Department for identification and management guidance. Noxious weed control may be required by law on some properties.

Call 811 Before You Dig

Always call 811 to locate underground utilities before any digging or excavation. This is required by law and protects both you and critical infrastructure.

Assess Your Site

- Identify flood-prone vs. well-drained areas
- Note sun exposure — full sun on south-facing banks vs. shade under existing canopy
- Observe where water pools or flows following rain events
- Determine soil type — sandy soils near the channel vs. heavier clay on higher terraces

Timing

Fall planting is preferred. Cooler temperatures and seasonal moisture allow roots to establish before summer heat. Early spring is a good alternative. Avoid peak summer heat unless consistent irrigation is available.

PLANTING BEST PRACTICES

Site Preparation

- Remove all invasive weeds before planting, especially Russian olive and tamarisk
- Sheet mulch with cardboard + 3" wood chips to suppress weeds without tilling
- Avoid deep tilling – it disturbs soil structure and brings weed seeds to the surface
- For large areas of turf removal, a sod cutter is efficient and minimizes soil disruption
- Lightly loosen compacted soils in planting holes only

Planting Technique

- Dig hole as deep as the root ball and 1.5–2× as wide
- Gently loosen circling or compacted roots before placing
- Set the top of the root ball at or slightly above the surrounding soil level
- Backfill with native soil – avoid excessive amendments
- Tamp lightly to remove air pockets, then water deeply
- Apply 2–3" of mulch after planting; keep mulch away from stems

Spacing & Design

- Plant in clusters of the same species – groups of 3–5 minimum
- Repeat species groupings to create rhythm and habitat patches
- Layer plants by height: large trees at the back, shrubs mid-slope, grasses and forbs at the water's edge
- Match spacing to mature plant size – overcrowding leads to competition and disease
- Anchor designs with 2–3 dominant keystone species, then fill with supporting species

Establishment Watering

- Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root development
- First growing season: water every 7–10 days in summer; reduce in fall
- Second year: reduce to occasional deep watering; let natural precipitation carry more load
- After year 2: most riverine natives require no supplemental irrigation
- Drip irrigation is recommended – it's efficient and reduces weed pressure
- Avoid overhead sprinklers where possible

Long-Term Care at a Glance

Year 1–2: Establish

- Water consistently; weed frequently
- Replace any plants that fail to establish
- Replenish mulch as needed
- Monitor for invasive regrowth

Year 3+: Maintain

- Reduce or eliminate irrigation
- Cut back perennials in late winter
- Leave seed heads and stems through fall and winter for wildlife
- Allow natural reseeding where appropriate

Ongoing Weed Management

Weeds are the most common challenge in new native plantings. Prioritize removal before they go to seed. Focus first on invasive and noxious species. Hand-pulling is preferred over broad herbicide use. As native plants mature and fill in, they will naturally suppress many weeds.

Wildlife-Friendly Maintenance

Leave some stems, seed heads, and leaf litter in place through fall and winter; these provide critical overwintering habitat for native insects, birds, and small mammals. Avoid removing all plant material at once. Minimize pesticide use in and around the riparian zone.

12 KEYSTONE SPECIES FOR THE RIVERINE ZONE

Keystone species are native plants that support a disproportionately large share of the food web. They are the foundation of any successful riparian planting — choose them first, then build supporting plant communities around them.

01. Black Cottonwood

Populus balsamifera ssp. trichocarpa

Role: Tall floodplain tree up to 100 ft; colonizes riverbanks and floodplains

Wildlife value: Canopy nesting for raptors and songbirds; woody debris for beaver and fish habitat

Why keystone: Foundational riparian canopy species — drives the structure of the entire corridor

Planting note: Shallow, suckering roots; do not plant near structures. Thrives in direct high-moisture sites.



02. Western Red Birch

Betula occidentalis

Role: Small multi-trunked riparian tree to 25 ft; reddish bark, yellow fall color

Wildlife value: Catkins support early pollinators; bark and seeds consumed by birds and small mammals

Why keystone: Stabilizes banks under variable moisture conditions with minimal maintenance

Planting note: Tolerates part shade; well suited to streambank edges and moist terraces.



03. Douglas Hawthorn

Crataegus douglasii

Role: Small thorny tree in floodplains and wet terraces; white flowers, dark berries

Wildlife value: Dense structure for nesting; fruit consumed by birds through winter

Why keystone: Adds structural diversity and strong wildlife value; tolerates saturated soils and periodic flooding

Planting note: Can be pruned to shape. Tolerates dry periods once established.



04. Bebb's Willow

Salix bebbiana

Role: Large shrub to small tree, 10–20 ft; riparian margins and slightly drier zones

Wildlife value: Critical early pollen source for honeybees; host for moth and butterfly larvae

Why keystone: One of the most ecologically rich willows in the region; supports early-season pollinators when little else is blooming

Planting note: Adaptable to slightly drier riparian margins where other willows struggle.

05. Coyote / Sandbar Willow

Salix exigua

Role: Thicket-forming shrub, 10–20 ft; fast colonizer of disturbed streambanks

Wildlife value: Critical beaver forage; nesting cover for riparian birds; early insect habitat

Why keystone: Best single species for immediate bank stabilization — fast root system anchors eroding banks

Planting note: Plant cuttings directly into moist bank soils for fastest establishment.



06. Redtwig Dogwood

Cornus sericea

Role: Mid-story shrub to 8 ft; brilliant red stems, white flowers, dark berries

Wildlife value: Berries consumed by over 40 bird species; strong browse plant for deer and elk

Why keystone: Four-season performer: flowers for pollinators, fruit for wildlife, stems visible as habitat structure through winter

Planting note: Prune one-third of oldest stems to the ground each spring to maintain stem color and vigor.

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07. Wood's Rose

Rosa woodsii

Role: Shrub, 4–12 ft; riparian edge and floodplain terrace; pink flowers, persistent red hips

Wildlife value: Flowers support native bees; hips provide critical winter food for birds and small mammals

Why keystone: One of the most wildlife-valuable shrubs in the valley — hips persist through winter when food is scarce

Planting note: May sucker aggressively — useful for erosion control but manage spread as needed.



08. Golden Currant

Ribes aureum

Role: Shrub, 4–6 ft; one of the first to leaf out in spring; fragrant yellow flowers

Wildlife value: Critical early-season nectar source; berries eaten by birds from summer through fall

Why keystone: Fills a vital early bloom window — provides pollen and nectar before most other natives have flowered

Planting note: Adaptable to disturbance and partial shade; tolerates drought once established.



09. Common Snowberry

Symphoricarpos albus

Role: Understory shrub, 4–6 ft; small pink flowers, white berry clusters

Wildlife value: Persistent white fruit is important winter food for birds; browsed by deer and elk

Why keystone: Highly adaptable groundcover-level shrub that fills in under larger plants, suppressing weeds and providing year-round habitat

Planting note: Very tolerant of shade, drought, and variable moisture — use in understory zones.



10. Tufted Hair Grass

Deschampsia cespitosa

Role: Clump-forming grass, 18–36 in; airy, shimmering seed heads from midsummer into fall

Wildlife value: Dense tufts provide nesting material and insect habitat; seeds consumed by sparrows and finches

Why keystone: Stabilizes soils on benches and terraces while adding fine texture and seasonal movement to the planting

Planting note: Use species form only in riparian areas — cultivars are available but may not support local insects as well.



11. Baltic Rush

Juncus balticus

Role: Upright rush, 14–30 in; spreads by rhizomes; tolerates fluctuating water levels

Wildlife value: Dense stands provide nesting cover for marsh birds; supports invertebrate communities in wet soils

Why keystone: One of the most important species for stabilizing wet soils at and near the water's edge; handles both flood and drought

Planting note: Excellent for wet areas where other plants struggle; rhizomatous spread helps fill gaps.

12. Sticky Geranium

Geranium viscosissimum

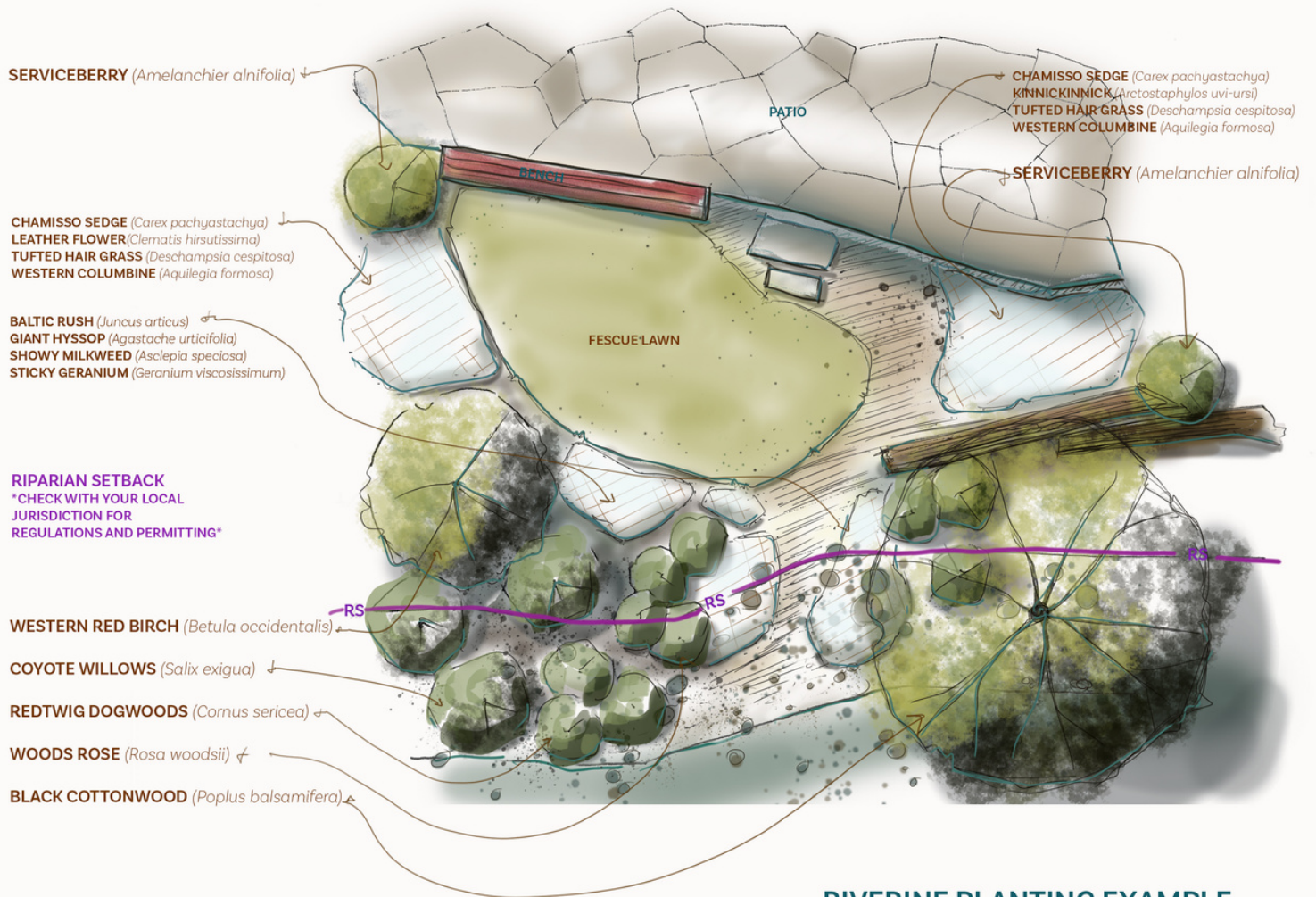
Role: Flowering perennial, 18–30 in; pink to carmine flowers; riparian edges and open understory

Wildlife value: Excellent mid-season nectar source for native bees, bumblebees, and butterflies

Why keystone: Adds critical forb diversity within shrub-dominated riverine systems; bridges the bloom gap between spring shrubs and late-summer grasses

Planting note: Establishes well in mesic soils with partial sun to light shade. Foliage can turn red in fall.

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RIVERINE PLANTING EXAMPLE

POLLINATOR GARDEN FOR THE RIVERINE ZONE

Even within a restoration planting focused on bank stabilization, a dedicated pollinator zone, **as small as 100–200 square feet**, dramatically increases the ecological value of your site. Use the plants below to create a continuous bloom sequence from early spring through late fall.

SPRING BLOOM (APRIL – MAY)

Golden Currant (*Ribes aureum*)

One of the first to flower each spring. Fragrant yellow blooms provide pollen and nectar at a critical time for overwintered bees and early hummingbirds.

Western Columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)

Distinctive red-and-yellow nodding flowers with backward spurs, precisely shaped for hummingbirds. Self-seeds readily in moist, shaded areas.

MIDSUMMER BLOOM (JULY – AUGUST)

Showy Milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)

The essential host plant for Monarch butterflies in the Big Wood watershed. Clusters of dusty pink flowers support bees, wasps, and a remarkable diversity of native insects.

Nettleleaf Giant Hyssop (*Agastache urticifolia*)

Tall spikes of pink to lavender flowers in summer. Exceptional pollinator plant visited by hummingbirds, native bees, and butterflies.

Slender Cinquefoil (*Potentilla gracilis*)

Cheerful yellow flowers with distinctive divided leaves. A reliable midsummer pollinator plant for mesic riparian edges.

EARLY SUMMER BLOOM (JUNE – JULY)

Twinberry Honeysuckle (*Lonicera involucrata*)

Paired yellow flowers in burgundy bracts. A reliable hummingbird magnet and one of the most structurally distinctive native shrubs in the riparian zone.

Sticky Geranium (*Geranium viscosissimum*)

Pink to carmine flowers provide excellent mid-season nectar for native bees and bumblebees. Adds forb diversity within shrub-dominated plantings.

Rocky Mountain Iris (*Iris missouriensis*)

Pale blue flowers with intricate veining in early summer. Grows in wet meadows and along streambanks; forms attractive colonies over time.

EARLY SUMMER BLOOM (JUNE – JULY)

Western Coneflower (*Rudbeckia occidentalis*)

Striking dark seed heads with no petals — architectural and unusual. Good late-season pollinator and seed source for birds through winter.

Common Camas (*Camassia quamash*)

Spectacular blue-violet flower spikes in late spring to early summer in wet meadow areas. Plant bulbs in fall. Historically one of the most important food plants in the region.

Design Tip

Plant pollinator species in clusters of 5–7 or more. A single plant has minimal impact; a patch of showy milkweed or columbine is visible from a distance, attracts more insects, and holds them longer.

Resources & Support

Apply for a Grants for Grass Award

projectbigwood.org/apply

Invasive Species of Idaho

idahoinvasives.org

Blaine County Noxious Weed Department

<https://www.blainecountyid.gov/225/Noxious-Weeds>

Idaho Native Plant Society

idahonativeplants.org

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Local Native Plant Nurseries

Webb Landscape & Nursery – Bellevue, ID · webbland.com

North Fork Native Plants – Rexburg, ID ·

northforknativeplants.com

Draggin' Wing High Desert Nursery – Boise, ID ·

waterthriftyplants.com

Great Bear Native Plants – Corvallis, MT ·

greatbearnativeplants.com

Questions about your project?

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