



## **Draft Nature Strip Planting Guidelines**

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January 2024

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to the Elders of these traditional lands, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past, present and emerging.

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# 1 Nature Strip Planting Guidelines

## 1.1 Introduction

Council recognises that nature strips contribute to a healthy environment for people, plants and animals and has a responsibility to manage the risks associated with landscaping works on public land.

The Nature Strip Planting Guidelines (Guidelines) support residents who wish to plan, plant and maintain an alternative to a grass nature strip adjacent to their residential property in a way that is not detrimental to local amenity and ensures roads and footpaths remain safe and accessible.

The Guidelines support the implementation of Council's Nature Strip Planting Policy.

The key principles of the Nature Strip Planting Policy are that:

- Nature strips contribute to a healthy environment for people, plants and animals.
- Nature strips accommodate essential services for the community.
- Nature strips need to be safe and accessible spaces.

The Policy intends to achieve a balance between the benefits that well-maintained nature strips provide to the urban environment with recognition that any risks that could arise as a result of landscaping on public land need to be managed to minimise loss and damage.

## 1.2 Purpose

The Guidelines provide direction on how to plan and deliver your planted nature strip, the information you will need to complete the application, your responsibilities for maintaining the nature strip, and links to additional resources.

## 1.3 What is a nature strip?

Nature strips are the areas of public land within a road reserve that are located between the edge of the road or back of the kerb and the property boundary, that are not occupied by the footpath and private road crossings. They are typically a strip of grass with a tree planted in it and provide valuable green spaces in urban areas.

Nature strips also accommodate underground services, provide a space for the collection of waste bins and need to be safe and accessible for road users and pedestrians at all times.

The regular maintenance and upkeep of nature strips is undertaken by the resident living in the property that abuts each one. This involves mowing, weeding, trimming edges and picking up litter. The exception to this are street trees as these are planted and maintained by Council.

## 1.4 Planting details

Council recognises that there are a range of environmental and social benefits from having a planted nature strip.

Council will permit residents to plant the nature strip abutting their residence, subject to receiving a Nature Strip Planting Permit.

Residents have the option to plan, create and maintain their nature strip subject to receiving a Nature Strip Planting Permit. The nature strip may include ground cover plants, low growing shrubs, herbs and vegetables if they would prefer any of these instead of grass.

Council encourages the use of local, indigenous plant species in any gardening – on the nature strip, in the front yard, and in the back yard. Indigenous species support local ecosystems better than native and non-native alternatives and help to promote greater local biodiversity.

A list of suggested ground cover and shrub species suitable for nature strip planting is included in Appendix A.

Other plants may be considered suitable, however Council will not permit the use of:

- prickly or spiky plants
- shrubs which grow higher than 50cm; and
- weed species

## 1.5 Weed species

Some plants are not suitable for nature strip planting or are prohibited by law because they are a declared noxious or environmental weed.

Common weeds include:

*Nassella trichotoma* (Serrated tussock)

*Nassella neesiana* (Chilean needle grass)

*Lycium ferocissimum* (Boxthorn)

*Coprosma repens* (Mirror bush)

*Opuntia stricta* (Prickly pear)

*Cotoneaster glaucophyllus*  
(Cotoneaster)

*Galenia pubescens* (Blanket weed)

*Brassica rapa* (Mustard weed)

*Echium plantagineum* (Pattersons Curse)

*Pittosporum undulatum* (Sweet pittosporum)

*Foeniculum vulgare* (Fennel)

*Moraea flaccida* (Cape tulip)

Some plants are banned in Victoria because they threaten Victoria's biodiversity and agriculture. These plants are called 'declared weeds'. All Victorians are prohibited by law from growing or selling these plants.

Other plants have been identified as not suitable for nature strip planting as they can become a weed. These plants are called 'garden escapees'. Their seeds can travel to other areas of open space and along storm water systems into waterways.

A list of weedy plants that are not to be planted in nature strips in Maribyrnong is included in Appendix B.

## 1.6 Items not permitted

Only plants, soil and mulch are permitted in as part of works on nature strips. Items that are not permitted include:

- Irrigation systems
- Raised structures such as garden edging, retaining walls, railway sleepers, fencing posts or star pickets that may pose a tripping hazard (for information relating to planter boxes please refer to section 1.12 of these guidelines).
- Rocks, gravel, synthetic turf and non-permeable surfaces
- Letterboxes, street libraries, furniture and play equipment. These need to be installed within the resident's property boundary.

A limited area covered by pavers, stepping stones or granitic sand may be permitted to facilitate access to other parts of the nature strip, and pedestrian movements between the roadway and the footpath. These surfaces must have a non-slip surface and be at a level that is flush with the finished mulch level.

## 1.7 Street trees

Council is responsible for selecting, planting and maintaining street trees. These trees are carefully chosen to provide shade, shelter and cleaner air as well as habitat for native fauna.

Residents are not permitted to plant, alter or remove a tree in their nature strip however requests for street trees are welcomed and encouraged. Residents can contact Council to ask for a street tree to be planted in the nature strip and Council will arrange for an appropriate tree species to be planted at a suitable time of the year.

Fruit trees are not suitable street tree species. Many species of fruit trees are not drought tolerant, they provide less canopy cover than other tree options and are likely to drop fruit and create a slipping hazard for pedestrians.

Any other planting on the nature strip should not be within 50cm of the base of the trunk and be planted without excavating soil under the canopy of the tree.

Care should be taken to not damage any roots when digging within the vicinity of street trees. If you uncover tree roots, do not cut, scrape or damage them.

Material such as mulch or grass clippings should not be mounded around or above the base of the trunk.



## 1.8 Lawn alternatives

To maximise the environmental benefit of a nature strip as much of the nature strip should be planted and permeable as possible.

Lawn alternatives like synthetic turf, and hard and impervious surfaces that store heat and prevent water being absorbed into the ground are not permitted.

Permeable surfaces improve the quality of stormwater runoff as they remove and filter nutrients and sediment, and allow water to infiltrate into the ground which replenishes groundwater and supports the health of street trees.

## 1.9 Planting locations

Nature strip planting works must maintain adequate clearance, accessibility and visibility for pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic when using, entering or exiting an intersection, driveway or footpath. For these reasons, planting set-back and height requirements are outlined in these guidelines.

A minimum clearance distance of 50cm should be maintained between shrubs and plants (other than ground covers) from:

- back of kerb
- edge of the footpath
- around drainage pits
- around service pits and poles (power, telecommunications etc)
- from the edge of a driveway

Shrubs which exceed 0.5m in height must be pruned or lopped so that they comply with this height restriction, or replaced with a suitable plant that does meet this requirement.

The ground within these clearance zones can be covered in suitable ground cover plants or permeable mulch.

Even with compliant clearances in place due consideration will be given for the need to provide safe and suitable access to the footpath for people exiting a parked car.

Where there isn't a footpath abutting the residential property, a 1.5m wide strip suitable for pedestrian access must be retained in any planted nature strip.

A suitable space must be available on your nature strip to accommodate waste and recycling bins on collection days.

### 1.10 Mulch

A mulch layer will help maintain soil moisture and assist with additional weed control. The mulch material selected must be stable under foot and remain contained within the nature strip. Recommended treatments include:

- composted organic mulch
- pine bark mulch
- recycled wood chip mulch

The recommended level of mulch is approximately 75mm which allows rainfall to reach the soil while still reducing evaporation and erosion. Spreading ground cover plants can also be used to avoid the need for mulch once the plants mature.

### 1.11 Edible plants

Edible plants may be planted provided they fit with the planting locations and heights outlined within these guidelines.

Residents need to be aware that soil contamination is a common problem in urban areas. The nature strip soil should be tested for contaminants such as lead and any other potential health risks understood.

GardenSafe is a soil testing program run by Environment Protection Authority (EPA) that residents can access.

Residents must maintain the fruit and/or vegetables to manage and remove produce dropping on the nature strip, insect infestations or rotting items without using weed killers or pesticides that animals and other passers-by might come into contact with.

Edible plants are accessible to everyone who passes by and may be exposed to other contaminants. Conversely nothing can be enforced to stop the public from helping themselves to anything that is grown on a nature strip.

Council does not accept responsibility for illness or allergic reactions caused by consumption of or contact with plants planted on a nature strip.

### 1.12 Planter boxes

To reduce the risk posed by soil contamination, residents are encouraged to use raised planter boxes filled with clean soil in which to grow edible plants.

Planter boxes that sit above or on top of the ground for growing edible plants, herbs and vegetables are permitted on nature strips subject to application and approval.

General guidance is provided below and Council approval is required to ensure the suitability of the site and that minimum clearance distances can be maintained.



Planter Box Construction	Minimum distance from the intersection
Minimum Height	30cm
Maximum Height	80cm inclusive of planter box and vegetation
Floor	Required to contain the soil within the box
Material	Free of splinters, sharp edges and protrusions (e.g. nails, bolt heads, etc.)
Colour	In keeping with the local neighbourhood character

Should Council or a utility provider (e.g. gas, water or electricity provider) need to access its services within the nature strip, the resident may be required to remove the planter box prior to commencement of works.

There are some nature strips that are not in locations that are suitable for accommodating raised planter boxes. These will often be in close proximity to intersections. The higher the speed limit on the adjacent street the further from the intersection a planter box will need to be. The following minimum distances are a guide only and the suitability of a site will be considered by Council upon receipt of an application.

Speed limit on the adjacent street	Minimum distance from the intersection
Up to 50km/h	9 metres
60km/h	12 metres
Greater than 60km/h	15 metres

## 2 Construction and Maintenance

### 2.1 Site preparation

Only excavation and cultivation by hand (small hand tools) is permitted. Residents are not permitted to use mechanical means of excavation or cultivation due to the infrastructure that may be underground or the damage that may occur to street trees.

The resident is responsible for:

- repairing any damage to infrastructure caused by any landscaping works.
- reporting any damage to essential services or emergency services assets to the appropriate authority.

It is recommended that the top 50mm of turf and soil is scalped or removed prior to any planting or composted down. A good option is to then lay biodegradable weed matting or several layers of newspaper or cardboard, which is an effective means of reducing weed growth or the return of the turf.

### 2.2 Services and utilities

Nature Strips often contain essential services. Utility companies or emergency services may access their infrastructure for upgrades or repairs at any time, and therefore require access to be maintained.

Council and service authorities reserve the right to access existing and future infrastructure assets that may be located in and around your nature strip. Services, such as gas, power, communications, stormwater, sewer and water are often located in the nature strip, so be aware that your plants could be dug up and your planter boxes damaged with little or no warning.

While service authorities and Council will reinstate the nature strip to a neat finish, no plants or planter boxes will be repaired or replaced following any disturbance during access works. Any costs incurred to reinstate the plants and planter boxes will be borne by the resident.

Damaging services within a nature strip whilst gardening can be dangerous and costly. Before beginning any works on a nature strip contact Dial Before You Dig to confirm the presence of any services located within your nature strip.

### 2.3 Maintenance and obligations

It is the responsibility of the resident to maintain their nature strip. The nature strip must be kept clear and tidy, and safe for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles passing by.

To do this, residents are required to:

- Keep plants pruned to a height of no more than 50cm at all times.
- Prune plants so that they do not protrude onto pathways, driveways or beyond the back of kerb.

- Keep the nature strip free of weeds and rubbish.
- Maintain a mulch cover over any part of the nature strip where there are no other plants.
- Ensure mulch is contained within the nature strip and does not move onto the footpath or driveways, or into the kerb and channel.
- Keep the nature strip free of any tripping hazards and any protruding objects.
- Repair any damage to infrastructure caused by planting works.
- Address works considered unsightly or hazardous. This may require works to be maintained or removed and made safe as directed by Council.

## **2.4 Public liability**

Residents are reminded that they plant the nature strip at their own expense and own risk.

It is recommended that the resident extends their house and contents public liability insurance to include their planted nature strip.

### 3 Application Process

#### 3.1 Applying for a permit

It is important that Council maintains a record of any works undertaken on public land. Any resident wanting to undertake works on their nature strip must first apply for a permit in accordance with General Purposes Local Law No.37 (2015) or as amended, prior to commencing works.

Applications for planting and landscaping of a nature strip will be considered in accordance with the Nature Strip Planting Guidelines that support this Policy.

#### 3.2 Owners and neighbours approval

If you are the tenant of the property or share the nature strip with any other dwellings you will need approval from the property owner and/or your neighbours before you make any changes to the nature strip.

#### 3.3 Application submission and Council approval

Applications can be submitted using the Online Nature Strip Planting Approval Questionnaire. The Questionnaire steps applicants through the process and provides additional information needed to gain approval.

If you have the required information and contacts and your application meets the guidelines you will receive immediate approval upon completion of the Questionnaire.

If you don't have access to a computer or would like to complete the application by hand contact Council to request a form.

If you have undertaken works on your nature strip without having applied for a permit, you are required to apply for a permit that, when approved, will be issued retrospectively.

Where Council is asked to investigate nature strips where a safety concern has been raised or becomes aware of works on a nature strip that do not comply with the Guidelines, Council will work with residents to alter the planting and landscaping works to comply with the Guidelines. In rare situations where there is a continued conflict between the garden and safety, Council has the option to utilise the Local Law to issue orders and penalties, and to remove the planting and landscaping works and return the area to grass.

Ongoing maintenance of a planted nature strip is the responsibility of the resident, or any subsequent owners/occupants of the property for the life of the plantings.

Where a new resident does not wish to retain or cannot maintain a previously planted nature strip, they may reinstate the nature strip with natural turf grass.

#### 3.4 Ready to apply

(A link to the online application questionnaire will be inserted here)

## 4 Planning and Design

(Illustrations of design parameters including permitted and non-permitted items to be inserted here)

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## Appendix A Suggested species suitable for nature strip planting

### A.1. Indigenous: ground covers (up to 15 cm height)

Botanical name	Common Name	Description
<i>Atriplex semibaccata</i>	Berry Saltbush	Prostrate with succulent red fruits.
<i>Calocephalus citreus</i>	Lemon Beauty Heads	Hardy perennial herb with silver grey leaves and small lemon flowers in summer.
<i>Convolvulus erubescens</i>	Pink Bindweed	Bright pink flowers.
<i>Dichondra repens</i>	Kidney Weed	Mat forming herb with kidney shaped leaves.
<i>Disphyma crassifolium</i>	Rounded Noon Flower	Succulent ground cover with masses of bright pink flowers.
<i>Einadia nutans</i>	Nodding Saltbush	Trailing perennial with red or orange berries.
<i>Enchylaena tomentosa</i>	Ruby Saltbush	Low herb with fleshy leaves and red or yellow succulent berry.
<i>Hardenbergia violacea</i>	False Sarsaparilla	Hardy ground cover/climber with purple pea flowers in late winter-spring.
<i>Kennedia prostrata</i>	Running Postman	Prostrate ground cover with scarlet pea flowers in spring-summer.
<i>Myoporum parvifolium</i>	Creeping Boobialla	Fast growing spotted white flowers in spring.
<i>Scleranthus biflorus</i>	Twin Flowered Knawel	Green 'moss' like cushion, needs moisture.
<i>Viola hederacea</i>	Native Violet	Small white & mauve flowers most of year. Suitable for shady and moist areas.

NOTE: The above list is a guide and other plants that conform to the Nature Strip Planting Guidelines can be proposed



## A.2. Indigenous: low growing shrubs (up to 50cm height)

Botanical Name	Common Name	Description
<i>Brachyscome dentate</i>	Golden (lobe seed) Daisy	30 cm white daisy flower.
<i>Brachyscome multifidi</i>	Cut Leaf Daisy	30 cm purple daisy flower
<i>Calocephalus lacteus</i>	Milky Beauty Heads	Sprawling perennial with aromatic leaves and cream flowers in summer
<i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i>	Common Everlasting	30 cm golden flowers most of the year.
<i>Chrysocephalum semipapposum</i>	Clustered Everlasting	60 cm golden flowers in spring.
<i>Craspedia variabilis</i>	Common Billy-button	50 cm bright yellow flowers.
<i>Dianella revolute</i>	Spreading Flax Lilly	Very hardy perennial lily with deep blue flowers on stems
<i>Dicanthium sericium</i>	Silky Blue Grass	Erect tussock forming grass with blue-grey leaves & numerous silky flower spikes in summer
<i>Dichelachne crinite</i>	Long Hair Plume Grass	Fine leafed tussock grass with attractive cream coloured plumes on long stems
<i>Helichrysum sp. aff. Rutidolepis</i>	Pale Everlasting	Yellow button flowers spring to autumn
<i>Lobelia pratioides</i>	Poison Lobelia	Spreading herb blue flowers, prefers damp.
<i>Minuria leptophylla</i>	Minnie Daisy	20 cm with white or mauve daisy flowers
<i>Poa sp.</i>	Tussock grasses	Indigenous species may be suitable
<i>Podolepis jacoides</i>	Showy Podolepis	20 cm yellow flowers
<i>Pycnosorus chrysanthos</i>	Golden Billy-button	30 cm golden globular flowers
<i>Pycnosorus globosus</i>	Drumsticks	Silvery foliage with large globular yellow flowers
<i>Themeda triandra</i>	Kangaroo Grass	Purple-green foliage in spring turning pale rusty colour over summer.
<i>Wahlenbergia communis</i>	Tufted Bluebell	Bright blue bell shaped flowers in spring and autumn

NOTE: The above list is a guide and other plants that conform to the Nature Strip Planting Guidelines can be proposed

### A.3. Exotic and native: ground covers (up to 15 cm height)

Botanical Name	Common Name	Description
<i>Arctotis</i> sp.	African Daisy	Large daisy like flowers, different foliage.
<i>Dimorphoteca ecloni</i>	Veldt Daisy	Purple daisy like flowers.
<i>Festuca glauca</i>	Blue Fescue	10 cm blue-green grass in tufts.
<i>Grevillea</i> species	Eg. 'Poorinda Royal Mantle'	A dense matt forming ground cover with showy flowers.
<i>Ophiopogon japonicas</i>	Mondo Grass	Dwarf grass, other cultivars may be appropriate.
<i>Stachys byzantine</i>	Lamb's Ear	Silver grey foliage, flower heads need pruning after flowering.

NOTE: The above list is a guide and other plants that conform to the Nature Strip Planting Guidelines can be proposed

### A.4. Exotic and native: low growing shrubs (up to 50 cm height)

Botanical Name	Common Name	Description
<i>Anigozanthus</i> 'Little Joey'	Dwarf Kangaroo Paw	Other dwarf cultivars may be appropriate.
<i>Coprosma acerosa</i>		Hardy evergreen shrub to 300mm.
<i>Cotoneaster microphylla</i>		Prostrate shrub with red berries
<i>Dianella</i> sp.	Flax Lilly	Dwarf cultivars may be appropriate
<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i> 'Bar Harbour'		Low shrub dark green shrub
<i>Luecophyta brownii</i> 'Silver nugget'	Cushion Bush	Hybrid dwarf form of the local coastal cushion bush, grey foliage.

NOTE: The above list is a guide and other plants that conform to the Nature Strip Planting Guidelines can be proposed.

## Appendix B Weedy plants not to be planted in nature strips

Botanical Name	Common Name
<i>Agapanthus praecox subsp. Orientalis</i>	Agapanthus
<i>Sparaxis bulbifera</i>	Bulbil Sparaxis
<i>Anredera cordifolia</i>	Madeira Vine
<i>Spartina spp.</i>	Cord-grasses
<i>Araujia sericifera</i>	Moth Plant
<i>Tradescantia fluminensis</i>	Small Leaf Spiderwort
<i>Asparagus scandens</i>	Asparagus Fern
<i>Tropaeolum majus</i>	Nasturtium
<i>Billardiara fusiformis</i> or <i>B. heterophylla</i>	Bluebell Creeper
<i>Vinca major</i>	Blue Periwinkle
<i>Chlorophytum comosum</i>	Spider Plant
<i>Zantedeschia aethiopica</i>	Arum Lily
<i>Coprosma repens</i>	Mirror Bush
<i>Cortaderia selloana</i>	Pampas Grass
<i>Cotoneaster Sp</i>	Cotoneaster
<i>Crocomia x crocosmiiflora</i>	Montbretia
<i>Dieties species</i>	Wild Iris
<i>Dipogon lignosus</i>	Dolichos Pea
<i>Gazania lineris</i> or <i>G. rigens</i>	Gazania
<i>Genista monspessulana</i>	Montpellier Broom
<i>Hedera helix</i>	English Ivy
<i>Ipomoea indica</i>	Morning Glory
<i>Lobularia maritima</i>	Sweet Alyssum
<i>Lophopyrum ponticum</i>	Tall Wheat-grass
<i>Pennisetum setum</i>	Fountain Grass
<i>Pennisetum villosum</i>	Feathertop Grass
<i>Polygala myrifolia</i>	Myrtle Leaf Milkwort
<i>Rubus fruticosus spp. agg</i>	Blackberry



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