



Locality Sustainability Community  
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## Rewilding Stonnington

### Indigenous Nature Strips: Guidelines



Compiled by Graham Ross and members of Rewilding Stonnington Inc. 2021-22.

## Contents

1. Introduction-Planting Guidelines .....	3
2. Background .....	3
3. Benefits .....	3
4. Showcase .....	3
5. Comparable Guides .....	4
6. Risk minimisation .....	4
7. Plant List.....	4
8. Implementation .....	5
9. Resources/Further reading .....	6
Appendix 1: Planting suggestions Stonnington 2022 .....	8

We at Rewilding Stonnington acknowledge that we live and work on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung and Bunurong peoples of the East Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the living connection to country of Traditional Owners and honour their care for country, its lands and waterways, plants and animals over tens of thousands of years. We respect and learn from their wisdom through the voices of Elders and leaders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

## 1. Introduction-Planting Guidelines

This is a brief introduction to nature strip planting with indigenous and endemic plants, first compiled by Graham Ross in 2021 for Rewilding Stonnington. Rewilding Stonnington Inc. actively encourages residents to plant out their nature strips with indigenous plant species. We also encourage the City of Stonnington to adopt a policy that makes it easier to plant on nature strips/verges, with simplified requirements and an expedited approvals process. Please note that as of 2022, Council is developing such a policy but does not yet have one in place. Residents wishing to revegetate their nature strips are required to submit a formal permit application to [council@stonnington.vic.gov.au](mailto:council@stonnington.vic.gov.au) (tel 8290 1333) with a proposed design, plant list and etc. Approvals are granted on a case by case basis. This takes considerable time and effort from all concerned; we look forward to smoother pathways in the near future. These Guidelines have been prepared as a background to further discussions and to help people who are looking for advice.

For further information please feel free to contact us via [rewildingstonnington@gmail.com](mailto:rewildingstonnington@gmail.com)

## 2. Background

The City of Stonnington has a chronic shortage of open space, with one of the lowest ratios of green open space per capita, of any municipality in Victoria (CoS Open Space Strategy 2013). Nature strips/verges account for up to 30% of public open space. Many residents already feel a connection to 'their' nature strips and put effort into maintaining them; but a standard grassed nature strip has very little biodiversity value and is often seen as a liability, requiring regular and intensive mowing, watering, weed control etc. In neighbourhoods with high density housing, verges can become neglected. There are large areas of Stonnington where verges are in a sad state, bare or overgrown with weeds. This is a regrettable waste of scarce natural resources.

## 3. Benefits

A nature strip revegetated with indigenous and endemic plant species increases biodiversity, provides habitat for birds and insects, helps reduce the urban heat island effect and absorbs more run-off in heavy rains. It can be both environmentally and aesthetically pleasing, requiring less maintenance once established. Studies have also shown that green spaces have positive impacts on mental and physical health (CoS submission to Victorian Parliamentary Enquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health, 2011). It makes a great deal of sense to build on residents' existing custodianship of nature strips and their growing awareness of the need to combat climate change, promoting community engagement to improve this vital aspect of public space.

## 4. Showcase

Some people may perceive 'native' nature strips as messy and disordered. This could be overcome by the Council promoting showcase indigenous nature strips for the benefit of both planters and neighbours.

## 5. Comparable guides

Many Melbourne municipalities have now adopted nature strip and street gardening policies; not all focus on indigenous plants but advice on indigenous plant species suitable for the area concerned is increasingly readily available.

City of Stonnington issued a booklet, Sustainable Gardening in Stonnington, as far back as 2009 but has yet to adopt Nature Strip Guidelines. Amongst nearby Councils, City of Boroondara produced Nature Strip Guidelines in 2015. The Guidelines and accompanying Nature Strip renovation permit application form are currently being revised; current versions are available via

<https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/parking-streets/streets-and-roads/nature-strips>

After considerable community feedback and discussion, City of Port Phillip's Nature Strip and Street Gardening Guidelines were released in August 2022.

<https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/media/tggjf0eh/nature-strip-guidelines-2022.pdf>

We encourage residents and Council to benefit from the experience of other municipalities, in producing guidelines appropriate for conditions across Stonnington. This may vary from one area to another. Please see the Resources section for other suggestions.

## 6. Risk minimisation

Along with adoption of clear and easy to follow Guidelines, Rewilding Stonnington recommends the introduction of a simple permit system. Pre-approved templates with simple design elements and pre-approved plant selection could be self-assessed or otherwise guaranteed a fast turnaround. Council could help promote the scheme with plant vouchers and other practical assistance.

Risk of tripping, access to gates and pathways, spaces for garbage collection, access to services, preservation of street trees etc are valid issues, however the adoption of templates and clear processes including e.g. Dial Before You Dig will help minimise risk.

## 7. Plant List

Circulation of a Council approved plant list is a vital next step; please see the list Graham has prepared (Appendix 1 below). Inappropriate planting, including ineffective soil preparation and planting at unsuitable times of year, is a big risk from both a plant survival and a safety point of view. Provisions in approved templates such as the inclusion of a border of suitable clump forming grasses will help protect against larger plantings impinging on the footpath and causing a trip hazard.

A hedge barrier on a nature strip can be extremely effective in reducing pollution levels to residential properties facing main roads, but should only be permitted if located along the centre of the nature strip and with consent of adjoining properties.

Our recommendation is that applications for nature strip projects adopting approved design template and plant selection criteria be eligible for expedited approval, and a lower fee. Properties requiring a site visit and/or more detailed discussion may still require case by case approval.

## 8. Implementation

We recommend a 5 stage process:

1. Assess the site including orientation, soil type and health, pathways and access points. Survey existing vegetation including trees; trees on the site will require special attention to avoid interfering with root systems. Determine overall approach and suitability for expedited approval. Talk to your neighbours! to ensure the project has their support and if possible, participation. If you are working in collaboration with Rewilding Stonnington, share information with us and discuss the level of support you require.
2. Finalise design template and plant selection, from approved/recommended list. Prepare documentation required for Council approval including site identification, simple design (or template selection), plant list ditto. Do a Dial Before You Dig check for any service, right of way or other approval issues. Submit application!
3. Fix the date for your first working bee, according to expected approvals timeline. Be flexible: local seasons and weather may influence the best time to begin (best seasons for planting are autumn-winter into spring). The first task is to discourage exotic vegetation and prepare the soil; you may need to mow, scalp and/or scarify the site, remove roots, sift the soil to remove bulbs and tubers by hand, taking special care around tree roots. We don't recommend the use of weed killer but you could try other methods for deterring weed growth such as laying newspaper or cardboard. Finish with a good thick layer of mulch!
4. Over the next couple of weeks/months, check for new growth and remove weeds. Fix the date and issue invitations for your second working bee – remember that more than one planting session may be required to allow keystone plants like grasses to establish, before adding fussier/more fragile feature plants. Don't forget to finish each session with a convivial get together, congratulations are in order!
5. Ensure effective maintenance, according to site and seasonal requirements. Regular checks and hand weeding will be needed while plants establish; after that, once every couple of weeks (or months during winter), should be sufficient. In our opinion, indigenous plantings need not as a general rule be irrigated; watering by hand or hose during establishment or extended periods of drought may be advisable. If in doubt, mulch!

Take up could be further encouraged by Council e.g. providing vouchers for local indigenous nurseries, on a rate / m<sup>2</sup> of nature strip to be planted (conditional on 100% native indigenous plantings). Some councils offer rebates; another option could be Council helping to mow or scalp sites in preparation for planting, thus taking out one of the main barriers to installing a planted nature strip.

The main message is it can be done! The effort is worth it, the benefits are great. We gain knowledge and experience with every project. The more interest there is, the greater the momentum – and the greater the benefit to the environment, to our local communities, to our own wellbeing and that of future generations.

## 9. Resources/further reading

**Indigenous plant nurseries:** are a great source of knowledge as well as plants! Often run co-operatively or by volunteers, so do check opening hours before visiting. Local(ish) nurseries include:

VINC (Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-op) Yarra Bend Road, Fairfield, VIC 3078

<https://www.vinc.net.au/>

Bili Nursery and Landcare 525 Williamstown Rd, Port Melbourne VIC 3207

<https://westgatebiodiversity.org.au/bili-nursery/>

Greenlink Box Hill 41 Wimmera St, Box Hill North VIC 3129 <https://greenlinkboxhill.org>

Bungalook Nursery 63-107 Fulton Road, Blackburn South, Vic 3130 <https://www.wcipp.org.au/>

CRISP Indigenous Plant Nursery 17 Greenwood Avenue Ringwood, VIC 3134

<https://www.crispnursery.org.au/>

Operation Revegetation Pty Ltd 72 Scoresby Rd, Bayswater VIC 3153 <http://www.reveg.net.au/>

Greenlink Sandbelt 587 Heatherton Rd, Clayton South <https://www.greenlinksandbelt.org.au/>

La Trobe University Bundoora (also nesting boxes) <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/wildlife>

Melton Botanic Garden 40 Lakewood Blvd, Melton VIC 3337 <https://fmbg.org.au/>

Also:

The nursery (and bookstore) at CERES cnr Roberts & Stewart Streets Brunswick East, VIC 3057 is permaculture focused but does stock First Nations food plants <https://ceres.org.au/nursery/>

Kuranga Native Nursery is a commercial outfit (nb: 'native' plants are not necessarily indigenous!) but has an extensive range and helpful staff 118 York Rd Mt Evelyn, VIC 3796 <https://www.kuranga.com.au/>

**EVC benchmarks:** apart from consultation with Traditional Owners and Elders, the most comprehensive information on floristic communities (indigenous plant species endemic to regional and local ecologies) in Victoria comes from mapping of Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) carried out by the now Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DWELP) since 1994. The Stonnington/Higgins area is in the Gippsland Plain Bioregion. A full suite of information sheets is available on the DWELP website or via [Ecological Vegetation Class Benchmarks of the Gippsland Plain Bioregion \(PDF, 1.6 MB\)](#)

EVC 56, floodplain riparian woodland, applies to many areas in Stonnington although the species list is by no means exhaustive. As Graeme Lorimer points out, (Lorimer, Graeme S. 'Melbourne's plant life - past and present' *The Victorian Naturalist* 128 (5) 2011 pp. 175-182) native vegetation in the Melbourne region was already heavily diminished in extent and composition by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The threat is ongoing, as must be efforts at revegetation. Stonnington residents may find more easily accessible detail on suitable plant species by consulting

**Books:** Check your local library, specialist bookshops or suppliers online.

*Flora of Melbourne* by Marilyn Bull and George Stolfo (4<sup>th</sup> edn) Melbourne: Hyland House 2014

*Native Trees and Shrubs of South Eastern Australia* by Leon Costermans, Redd New Holland 2009

*Australian Grasses: a gardener's guide to native grasses, sedges, rushes and grasstrees* by Nick Romanowski Melbourne: Hyland House 2011

**Grasses:** grasses are the heart of country! and the foundation of a healthy nature strip ...

Tips by James Beattie, from his Garden Drum blog, a 2 part series on establishing native grasslands on nature strips in Melbourne (2017)

<https://gardendrum.com/2017/05/23/gardening-with-native-grasses-a-nature-strip-study/>

<https://gardendrum.com/2017/12/19/how-to-grow-an-australian-grassland-part-2-planting-maintenance/>

Extract from Part 1:

I'm really keen on the wallaby grasses as ornamentals. Some of our local spear grasses are garden-worthy as well. I'd recommend kneed wallaby grass (*Rytidosperma geniculatum*) – it's low-growing and will form a nice carpet topped with sumptuous amounts of flowers/glumes over many months. It seeds embarrassingly well, which it regenerates from very well if the parent plants die.

As far as spear grasses go, *Austrostipa elegantissima* looks wonderful *en masse*. Large feathery heads of flowers, not entirely unlike the smokiness of cotinus. *Austrostipa rudis* is another winner, with tall flower spikes that look great punctuating the lower-growing wallaby grasses.

*Austrostipa stipoides* is one of my all time favourites. I always think of it as a much more handsome and robust/architectural poa lab – the blades stand straight up and have wonderful russet tones. It does get larger than poa lab though. It's a coastal native and I've seen it growing happily in some remarkably crappy, sandy soils. However, I can't vouch for its veracity in a green roof situation – but given its natural habitat, it'd be worth a shot.

nb: comments included one caution about potential injury to dogs from spear grasses ...

You could also check out Stephen Murphy's 'Recreating the Country' blog, via his informative website <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/>

### Other useful links:

BirdLife Australia <https://birdlife.org.au/>

Climate Action Network <https://www.cana.net.au/>

Environment Victoria <https://environmentvictoria.org.au/>

Gardens for Wildlife Victoria <https://gardensforwildlifevictoria.com/>

iNaturalist Australia <https://inaturalist.ala.org.au/>

International Environmental Weed Foundation <http://www.iewf.org/>

Landcare Australia <https://landcareaustralia.org.au/>

National Tree Day – a project of Plant Ark <https://treeday.planetark.org/>

Sustainability Victoria <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/>

Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne <https://www.rbg.vic.gov.au/>

Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria <http://www.rhsv.org.au/>

Tree Project <https://treeproject.org.au/>

**Rewilding Stonnington: Planting suggestions 2022**

- Leptospermum continentale Prickly Tea-tree
- MS Epacris impressa Common Heath
- MS Cassinia aculeata Common Cassinia
- MS Acacia paradoxa Hedge Wattle
- SS Pimelea humilis Common Rice-flower**
- SS Hibbertia riparia Erect Guinea-flower**
- PS Bossiaea prostrata Creeping Bossiaea**
- PS Astroloma humifusum Cranberry Heath
- PS Acrotriche serrulata Honey-pots**
- LH Pterostylis longifolia s.l. Tall Greenhood
- MH Gonocarpus tetragynus Common Raspwort
- MH Drosera peltata ssp. auriculata Tall Sundew
- SH Dichondra repens Kidney-weed**
- SH Opercularia varia Variable Stinkweed
- SH Drosera whittakeri ssp. aberrans Scented Sundew
- LTG Deyeuxia quadriseta Reed Bent-grass
- LTG Xanthorrhoea minor ssp. lutea Small Grass-tree
- LTG Lomandra longifolia Spiny-headed Mat-rush
- LNG Gahnia radula Thatch Saw-sedge
- MTG Lomandra filiformis Wattle Mat-rush**
- MTG Themeda triandra Kangaroo Grass**
- MTG Poa sieberiana Grey Tussock-grass**
- MTG Lepidosperma laterale Variable Sword-sedge**
- MNG Microlaena stipoides var. stipoides Weeping Grass
- GF Pteridium esculentum Austral Bracken
- SC Comesperma volubile Love Creeper
- SC Billardiera scandens Common Apple-berry**

4m

3m

4m

