Locality Sustainability Community
rewildingstonnington@gmail.com
https://rewildingstonnington.org

# Rewilding Stonnington

# Indigenous Nature Strips: Guidelines

*Compiled by Graham Ross and members of Rewilding Stonnington Inc. 2021-22.*
*Last revised January 2024*

# Contents



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

Rewilding Stonnington Inc. actively encourages local residents to plant out their nature strips with indigenous plant species. This brief introduction to nature strip planting with indigenous and endemic plants includes advice on soil preparation and plant selection.
For further information please feel free to contact us via rewildingstonnington@gmail.com

# 2. Nature Strips in Stonnington

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, 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.

Many residents already feel a connection to 'their' nature strips and put effort into maintaining them; but until now, obtaining a permit to revegetate a nature strip has involved an arduous process, with approvals granted only on a case by case basis.

In November 2023, Council approved a new Nature Strip Planting Policy, with Guidelines, a Community Handbook and an online permit application process. The new process should go live in 2024 for an initial trial period of 12 months: for information please contact City of Stonnington council@stonnington.vic.gov.au or call 8290 1333

# 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

The new Council guidelines will require applicants to demonstrate that they have the support of at least two neighbours. While the beauty and biodiversity value of an indigenous nature strip will be obvious to many, others may perceive them as messy and disordered. Examples may help: Council could showcase indigenous nature strips for the benefit of both planters and neighbours. Also please see our website https://rewildingstonnington.org/projects/nature-strips/

# 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 as of 2024 has yet to update it.

Amongst nearby Councils, City of Boroondara produced Nature Strip Guidelines in 2015.
https://www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/media/11761/download?inline
City of Port Phillip's Nature Strip and Steet Gardening Guidelines were released in August 2022.
https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/media/tggjf0eh/nature-strip-guidelines-2022.pdf
There is also a Recommended Plant List.
https://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/media/ekglj05y/recommended-plant-species-list.pdf

The Shire of Yarra Ranges has produced an extensive local plant directory. While not all listed species are suitable for growing conditions in Stonnington, it's an excellent general resource for the Melbourne area.
https://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au/PlantDirectory/Home

We encourage residents and Council to benefit from the experience of other municipalities, in producing guidelines and plant lists appropriate for conditions in Stonnington. nb: this may still vary from one neighbourhood or microclimate to another. Please see the Resources section for other suggestions.

# 6. Risk minimisation

Rewilding Stonnington applauds the introduction by Council of clear and easy to follow Guidelines and a streamlined online permit application system. We would also advocate for the publication of sample templates with simple design elements, to assist with a faster approval turnaround.

Guidelines on heights and distances, access to gates and pathways, spaces for garbage collection, access for services, preservation of street trees etc are all useful, but the adoption of templates and clear processes including referral information for Before You Dig Australia (BYDA) will also help minimise risk.

# 7. Plant List

Preparation of a Council approved plant list is a vital next step; please see the list Graham has prepared (Appendix 1 below). We would also recommend circulation of a list of locally significant noxious and environmental weeds, given that many popular garden and even 'native' plants can become invasive. Ineffective soil preparation, inappropriate planting, and planting at unsuitable times of year, are also risks from both a plant survival and a safety point of view.

A hedge barrier can be extremely effective in reducing pollution levels to residential properties facing main roads, but could block access or become a trip hazard. Should be permitted if is located along the centre of the nature strip, under height restrictions 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 approval at a lower fee. Other projects requiring a site visit and/or more detailed discussion may still require case by case approval.

# 8. Implementation

We recommend residents wanting to revegetate their nature strip undertake 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 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 the 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, even sift the soil to remove bulbs and tubers by hand. Take special care around tree roots. Please note we don't recommend the use of weed killer in domestic settings. Plastic sheeting is generally to be avoided; biodegradable weed matting is available but can be expensive. You could try other methods for deterring weed growth such as (preferably) organic section barriers, or laying newspaper or cardboard. Whatever approach you choose at this stage, 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 and subsequent working bees – remember that more than one planting session may be required. Allow keystone plants like grasses to establish, before adding fussier/more fragile feature plants. And don't forget to finish each session with a convivial get together, it's great to share that sense of achievement!

5. Ensure ongoing 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; although watering by hand or hose may be advisable while plants establish or during extended periods of drought. When in doubt, add more mulch …

Remember that plants will respond in different ways to seasonal and climatic conditions. As your nature strip continues to establish, you will be able to observe how plants respond to the conditions of your particular site. You can adjust plant choice and position accordingly, but don't rush it. Give it time, bearing in mind the ultimate goal is as far as possible, to foster a self-sustaining strip requiring minimal intervention.

The main message is it can be done! The effort is worth it, the benefits are great – a small but meaningful contribution to the local environment, to the community and to your own and your neighbours' wellbeing and satisfaction.

# 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 20th 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 (4th 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/

**Appendix 1**

**Rewilding Stonnington: Planting suggestions 2024**

**Shrubs/small trees**
Acacia acinacea Gold Dust Wattle
Leptospermum continentale Prickly Tea-tree
Cassinia aculeata Common Cassinia
Epacris impressa Common Heath
Solanum aviculare Kangaroo Apple
**Medium height**
Xanthorrhoea minor ssp. lutea Small Grass-tree
Hibbertia riparia Erect Guinea-flower
Bulbine bulbosa Yellow bulbine lily
**Low growing/prostrate**
Correa alba White pea bush
Pelargonium australe Storksbill
Brachysome multifida Cut leaf daisy
Astroloma humifusum Cranberry Heath
Acrotriche s8errulata Honey-pots
Pimelea humilis Common Rice-flower
Calocephalus citreus Lemon Beauty-heads
Gonocarpus tetragynus Common Raspwort
Drosera peltata ssp. auriculata Tall Sundew
Wahlenbergia communis Australian bluebell
Kennedia prostrata Running postman
Dichondra repens Kidney-weed
**Strappy plants and grasses**
Dianella revoluta Flax lily
Lomandra longifolia Spiny-headed Mat-rush
Lomandra filiformis Wattle Mat-rush
Deyeuxia quadriseta Reed Bent-grass
Gahnia radula Thatch Saw-sedge
Poa labillardeierei Tussock grass
Poa sieberiana Grey Tussock-grass
Themeda triandra Kangaroo Grass
Lepidosperma laterale Variable Sword-sedge
Microlaena stipoides var. stipoides Weeping Grass
**Creepers**
Bossiaea prostrata Creeping Bossiaea
Hardenbergia violacea Purple coral-pea