



Colac Otway Shire

Nature Strip Planting Guidelines



Colac Otway
SHIRE

Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

The Colac Otway Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Gulidjan and Gadubanud peoples as the traditional owners of the Colac Otway region, the land upon which the activities of the Colac Otway Shire Council are conducted.

We pay our respects to their ancestors and elders, past, present and emerging. We recognise and respect their unique cultural heritage, beliefs and uphold their continuing relationship to this land.



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The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of numerous purple flowers with yellow centers, likely from a species like Dianthus barbatus. The flowers are in various stages of bloom and are set against a dark green background of leaves. A semi-transparent white rounded rectangle is centered on the page, containing the text. At the top of this rectangle is a teal-colored horizontal bar with the title text in white. The rest of the rectangle is white with black text. A large, faint, grey watermark with the word 'DRAFT' is oriented diagonally across the center of the page, behind the text box.

Nature Strip Guideline Objectives

Nature strips in urban and township environments have an important role to play in contributing to the environmental, social and aesthetic health of our shared community spaces.

Nature strips can enhance our streets by providing green zones; healthy and connected corridors; and improved street character.

They are also essential in providing a safe buffer between pedestrians and vehicular traffic, as well as space to support waste management and the maintenance of essential services.

Colac Otway Shire Council has developed these guidelines in order to support our community's endeavours to improve and beautify nature strips outside their property boundaries in urban and township settings.

Background

WHAT IS A NATURE STRIP?

The nature strip is the area of public land between the property boundary and the road kerb. It does not include the footpath, kerb or driveway.

Nature strips have many essential functions, such as:

- Providing a buffer between each private residence and the road;
- Providing a range of essential services, including telephone, gas, water, NBN, sewerage, electricity and street lighting;
- Being the primary location for kerbside household waste disposal service access;
- Providing safe access for service maintenance staff and postal services;
- Providing safe access for passengers, including wheelchairs and prams, to parked vehicles;
- Being the location of public bus stops.

Important social and environmental values of well planted and maintained nature strips include:

- Increasing biodiversity;
- Providing shelter and food for local wildlife;
- Establishing green corridors that link natural reserves to help wildlife move across the landscape;
- Providing canopy cover that cools the urban environment or township during the warmer months;
- Enhancing community connectedness and beautiful streetscapes;
- Enabling better water quality and flow into the soil to help with stormwater management and decrease flooding risk.



Road reserves in rural areas

A rural road reserve is the narrow strip of land between a property boundary and the road in areas outside the urban area designated by the beginning of the 80 km zone.

This public land houses utilities and is important for traffic safety, as well as being a place where indigenous or native plants can thrive and provide opportunities to improve the local environment. Modification of rural road reserves is not permitted.

Understanding responsibilities of nature strip management

STREET TREES

Council plants, prunes and maintains all street trees. Residents are not permitted to plant, prune or remove these trees.

As the responsible authority for street trees, Council selects species appropriate to the area, plants and then maintains them. This is due to the complexities of ensuring all aspects of safety are maintained, as well as necessary access to services, both above and below ground.

Community members are welcome to apply for a street tree adjacent to their property where there is not already a street tree. For further information and street tree request forms, please see [\[LINK\]](#).

NATURE STRIPS OUTSIDE PROPERTY BOUNDARIES

While the nature strip is publicly owned, as land manager Council supports residents in conducting plantings that comply with these guidelines and the permit and notification requirements outlined below.

Mown grass nature strips are currently the most common in Colac Otway Shire urban and township areas. They are low maintenance, and are compatible with some of the other regular requirements of nature strips, including accessibility and access to services.

A potentially highly beneficial alternative to grass is a planted and mulched nature strip, particularly where it is planted with low-growing indigenous plants. To achieve these benefits, it must be:

- Carefully planned,
- Consider public safety and access to the road reserve,
- Ensure safe and easy access to essential services,
- Be well maintained.



Nature Strip Modification Guidelines for Residents

COUNCIL HAS DEVELOPED THESE GUIDELINES IN ORDER TO SUPPORT RESIDENTS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE NATURE STRIP ADJOINING THEIR PROPERTY BOUNDARY. THE FOLLOWING PAGES OUTLINE WHAT THIS WILL INVOLVE.

HOW TO BEGIN

Planning

A well-designed nature strip garden begins at the planning stage. Before starting your nature strip garden project, consider the following:

- Read these guidelines to understand the requirements of planting in public space and to get tips on potential designs and species selection.
- Talk to your neighbours. Let them know what you are planning, talk through ideas and any concerns, and explore whether they would also like to join in.
- Consider what species are most appropriate for the conditions of your nature strip and the character of your streetscape.
- Consider planting indigenous plants to promote biodiversity and improve habitat for local fauna.
- Consider planting drought-tolerant species and grouping plants with similar water needs together to reduce water use.
- Create a design of your proposed nature strip planting - this will help you to ensure it meets the requirements of these guidelines and is in line with your vision of what you want to achieve.
- Consider and plan for what the ongoing maintenance requirements of your planting will be.

Essential Services

Nature strips play a major role in providing space for essential services to residential properties in our shire. These services include stormwater, power, NBN/telecommunications, gas, sewage, and water. Damaging these services while gardening can be dangerous and costly, so please consider this in your planning.

Council, utility companies, and contractors have the right to remove and disturb the nature strip and its soil as required without notice for the purpose of maintaining and/or improving essential services. Utility companies are required to reinstate level soil and grass on the nature strip following maintenance work, but are not required to reinstate nature strips that have been modified and landscaped with anything other than grass.

Permits & Notifications

Planting the nature strip

Nature strip planting by residents is permitted, provided the proposed modifications meet the specifications outlined in these guidelines. If any proposed landscaping treatment does not comply with these Guidelines, a permit is required.

Colac Otway Shire has a free permit and notification process in place for nature strip gardens. If you are planting your nature strip in accordance with these guidelines, you still need to notify Council. Simply fill out the form available here ([link](#)) with your details, address, a small checklist, and a rough plan for the nature strip you are landscaping. This allows Council to keep track of all the community efforts to improve nature strip gardens and ensure that you have considered all the requirements of planting in a nature strip.

If you wish to implement something in your nature strip that is outside of the guidelines, you are required to submit a permit application, available here ([link](#)). The application will then be reviewed and assessed to determine if the installation is appropriate.

Permits for driveways or other minor works within the road reserve

As the road reserve includes roadsides or nature strips, drains, verges, shoulders, and roadways, any treatments not covered within the scope of these guidelines, such as driveway construction, require a Works Within Road Reserve permit to be obtained. The application is available here ([link](#)).



ESSENTIAL SPECIFICATIONS

Footpath Safety and Protection

Footpaths play a major role in providing safety and access along roadsides. They must be kept free of obstructions so everyone can use them safely. Vegetation and mulch that encroaches on the footpath can impact the safety and accessibility of the path, especially for people using prams, wheelchairs, scooters, and people who might need assistance with mobility.

Council therefore requires that:

- A minimum 30cm offset is required on the nature strip beside any footpath. No plants or mulch can at any time encroach on the footpath.
- Where there is no sealed or clearly delineated footpath, 1.8m from the property boundary line must be retained to allow for safe access or the future development of a footpath.

Kerbside Safety and Protection

Nature strip planting can have an impact on road safety, and kerbside and footpath access. Considerations need to be made to ensure everyone can safely enter and exit vehicles and have access to the footpath. Plants growing into kerbs can also detrimentally impact stormwater flows, and present a hazard to people exiting parked cars.

Council therefore requires that:

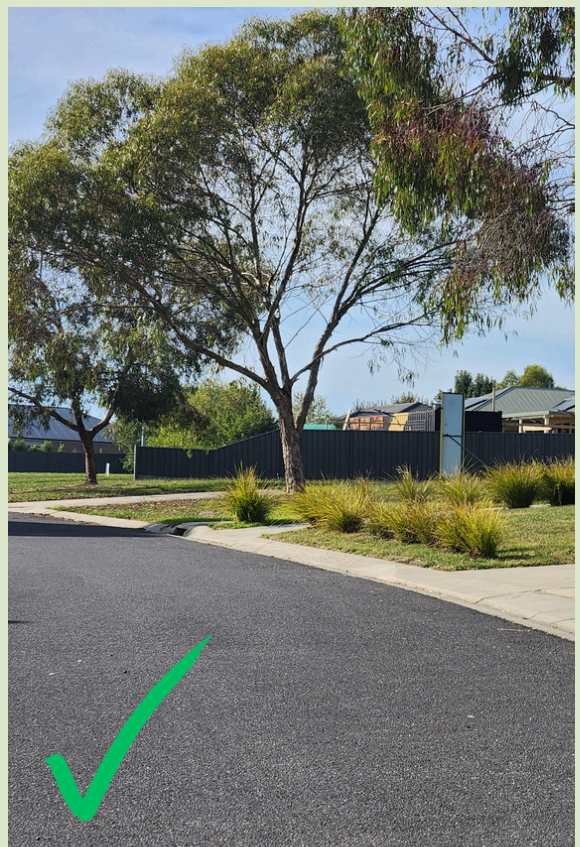
- There is a 50cm offset beside the kerb, and all plants are trimmed to maintain this buffer.
- You must keep a suitable area for kerbside rubbish collection within the nature strip.
- You can grow grass, a low groundcover, or have mulch in the offset area for access and kerbside rubbish collection.

Emergency Safety Protection - Fire hydrants

Fire hydrants are typically located underground in the nature strip, with a metal cover on top. They are identified by a blue reflector on a marker post or on the road. When landscaping a nature strip it is important to ensure that the fire hydrant is not buried and any marker post remains clearly in place.

Protection of Street Trees

- No plants can be planted within a 50cm radius buffer around the base of any street tree trunks, use small plants or tube stock to reduce the amount of digging required around the tree.
- Do not mound soil, mulch, or grass clippings against the tree trunk, as this can limit water and air flows and cause disease.
- Be careful when digging anywhere under the canopy of a tree. Use only hand tools. If the soil is hard to dig, you must stop, as this may indicate you are near a tree root.
- If you uncover tree roots, do not cut, scrape, or damage them. Re-bury them with soil and mulch.
- While groundcover plants that grow in a prostrate manner are welcome, climbing plants (such as vines) that may encroach on the trunk of a street tree and climb up it.

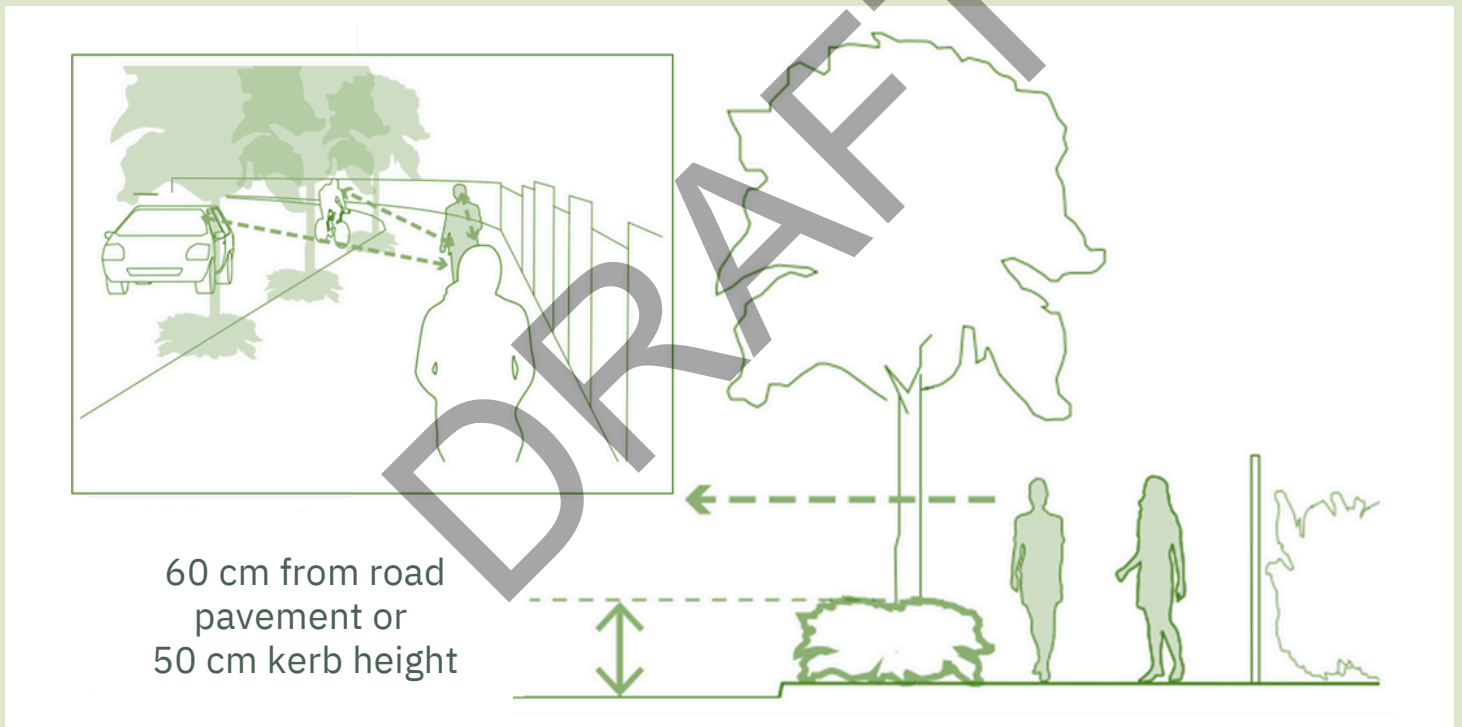


PLANTING REQUIREMENTS WITHIN THE NATURE STRIP

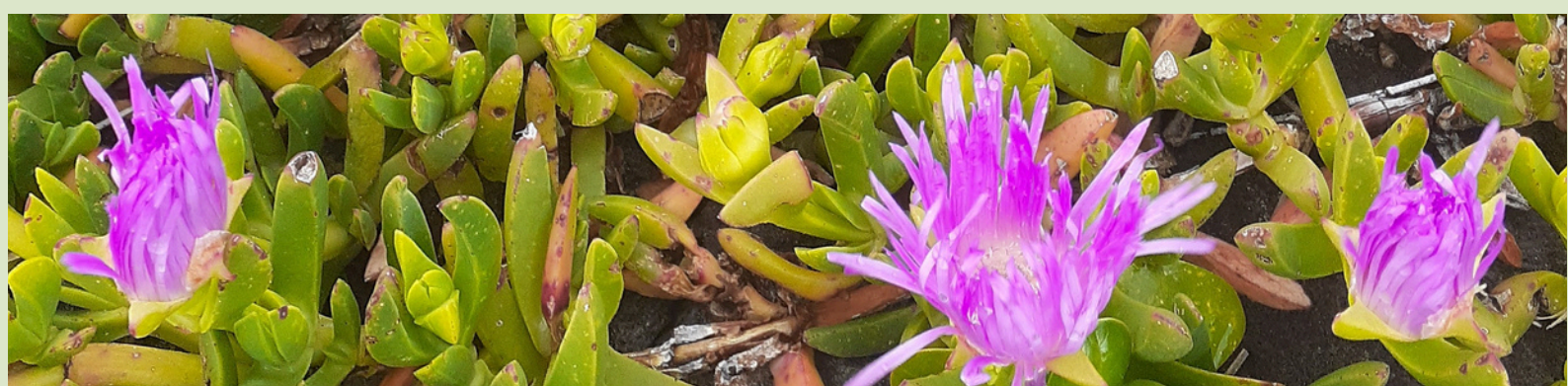
Council has designated the following height and buffer requirements in order to ensure safety and visibility for everyone walking, cycling, and driving, as well as safe access to essential services.

- All plants must be small species, kept under 50cm high in the central designated area of the nature strip (i.e 60cm from the surface of the road). This aligns with the Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria (section 6.3), which can be referenced at <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/urban-design-guidelines-for-victoria/objects-in-the-public-realm/trees-and-planting>

Street plantings must maintain clear sightlines along paths and streets. Landscaping along roads, streets, pedestrian and bicycle paths should not block sightlines for drivers, pedestrians or cyclists.

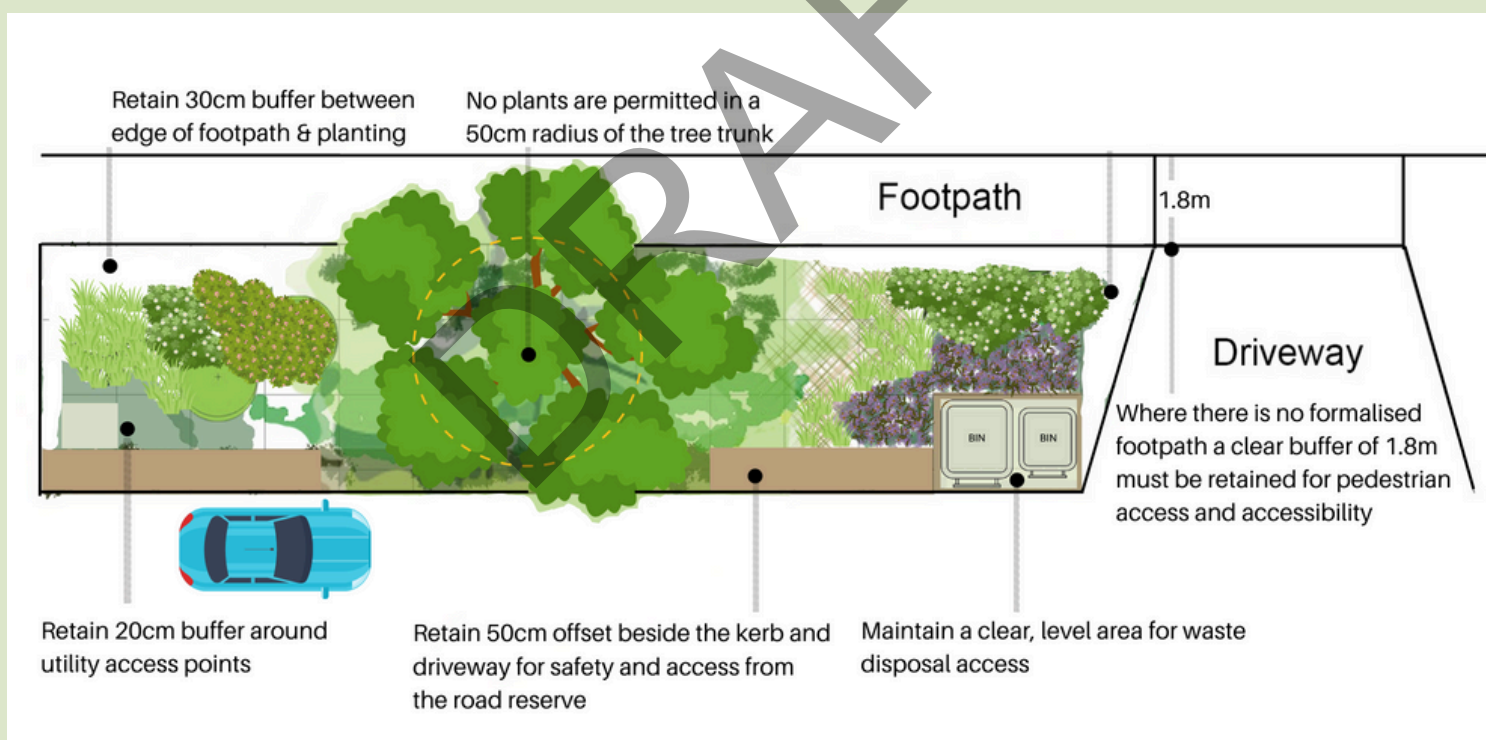


Source: Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria 2017



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- Plants must be kept under 10cm high within 5 metres from a corner, pedestrian crossing, or intersection.
- For nature strips with trees, you must keep a 50cm radius buffer zone around the base of the tree with no planting to ensure the root system of the tree is not disturbed.
- No plants may be planted in the following areas:
 - Within 50cm of the kerb and driveway
 - Within 30cm of the edge of the footpath
 - Within 20cm of any utility outlet.



Further important restrictions are:

- Plants cannot have spikes, thorns or prickles.
- Plants cannot be noxious or environmental weeds in Colac Otway Shire. Please see the following link for more information: <https://www.colacotway.vic.gov.au/Environment-Sustainability/Weed-management>
- An easily accessible area next to the kerb must be maintained for kerbside bin collections.

Residents must contact **'Before You Dig'** prior to undertaking landscaping works to ensure all underground services and access points are identified. This must inform the design of the nature strip planting. Before you dig can be contacted at: <https://www.byda.com.au/>

WHAT IS NOT ALLOWED

Edible Garden Planting

- Edible garden planting is not permitted due to potential soil contamination. Please note that Colac Otway Shire Council will not accept any responsibility or liability for injury or illness caused by food consumed from a nature strip. However, nature strips may add value to habitat corridors and food sources for animals.

Rocks and other infrastructure

Other infrastructure added to the nature strip can be unsafe and cause injuries. Also, changing the surface can cause harm to water and stormwater flows. Public safety is paramount when conducting any works in nature strips. Injury may occur if items:

- Become slippery or loose.
- Block sightlines.
- Cause injury if fallen on, for example if they have sharp or pointed edges.
- Become a trip hazard.
- Could be misused or create a risk.

Council wants to ensure that nature strip plantings avoid safety issues and contribute to the greening and cooling of our townships. Therefore Council has designated that nature strip plantings must not include:

- Anything other than plants and evenly spread fine surface treatments, such as mulch and gravel. Materials and structures that are not permitted include: raised edging, paving, irrigation, garden stakes, fencing, walls, furniture, play equipment, planter boxes, art, signs, rocks and letterboxes.
- Paving of nature strips is not permitted. However, removable stepping stones with a non-slip surface are permitted for access between the roadside and footpath or for kerbside bin placement. If stepping stones are used, they must be maintained at the same level as the mulch/soil to prevent trip hazards.
- Artificial lawn or other synthetic treatments that do not allow water to penetrate into the soil and can cause trip hazards.

Parking on nature strips

Parking is not permitted on nature strips in Colac Otway Shire, regardless of the surface of the nature strip. The landscaping of a nature strip is not an opportunity to create more parking for residents.

Other items not permitted to be added to the nature strip:

- Herbicide application to permanently retain a nature strip devoid of grass or vegetation.
- Altering the natural level of the nature strip through mounding of soil or other loose materials.
- Water features such as ponds or fountains.
- Works that create fire hazards.
- Plants that restrict access to utilities, essential services, and street or roadside.
- Plants with aggressive, deep root systems that may damage underground utilities and essential services.
- Fertilizers or garden sprays that may contaminate stormwater.



MAINTENANCE

Colac Otway Shire Council is the responsible authority for local roads and nature strips. Alternative plantings and maintenance that adhere with these guidelines must be maintained by the resident.

It is important to note that if you do not wish to modify your nature strips, then it is your responsibility as landowner or resident to maintain it by appropriately mowing your lawn.

Nature strip modification requires a collaboration among Council, essential services and utility providers, and community members who live adjacent to the nature strip to ensure that safe, healthy and beautiful nature strips are maintained for everyone to enjoy.

It is in this spirit that Council strongly supports community nature strip planting, when this adheres to the requirements outlined in this document. Ongoing maintenance is an essential part of this.

You can ensure that you maintain a healthy, viable nature strip by:

- Pruning plants regularly (excluding street trees) to ensure they do not protrude onto the footpath, driveways, kerbs or utility services.
- Keeping all plants pruned within the height guidelines specified in this document.
- Keeping the nature strip free of weeds, rubbish, and hazards.
- Maintaining appropriate access, including to the footpath, roadside and driveways.
- Maintaining utility and essential services nodes and access points in accordance with the guidelines.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THESE GUIDELINES OR MAINTAIN A NATURE STRIP

In incidences where public safety risks have been raised, Council will first work with the owner/resident to find an amicable solution to mitigate any safety or environmental issues. Where cooperation is not able to be quickly achieved, Council will require that the owner/resident rectifies these issues; in the case that this does not occur, Council will undertake appropriate remediation works. Colac Otway Shire Council will not take responsibility for any financial or other loss associated with the mitigation of safety issues on nature strips.

Further, if a resident fails to maintain their nature strip in accordance with these guidelines, Council may be left with no alternative other than to take enforcement action. The resident or landowner will be contacted and given a reasonable amount of time to remedy the issues identified, unless the level of risk necessitates immediate action.

In cases of non-compliance with any enforcement action taken by Colac Otway Shire Council (e.g. where a resident becomes uncooperative), Council will arrange for the reinstatement or maintenance of the nature strip. The cost of this management or reinstatement will be charged to the resident and/or landowner.

Some examples of failure to comply that may necessitate enforcement action are:

- Treatments in the nature strip pose a traffic or pedestrian hazard or safety concern.
- Appropriate access for pedestrians and other footpath users is not maintained.
- Treatments in the nature strip potentially pose a fire hazard.
- It interferes with the visibility and safety of road users.
- The nature strip contains noxious or environmental weeds.
- It otherwise does not comply with the requirements outlined in this document.



CHANGE OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

In the event that the nature strips adjoining a property changes ownership, it is the responsibility of the previous property owner to share and communicate the requirements of the nature strip garden guidelines to the new owner. It then becomes the new landowner's responsibility to maintain the nature strip in line with the guidelines.

The owners have two options:

- The new owner takes on the nature strip garden as part of the change of ownership.
- The previous owner needs to remove the garden and reinstate the standard grassy nature strip.
- If the property is rented, it becomes the responsibility of the tenant to maintain the nature strip. It is the landowner or rental agent's responsibility to communicate this to the tenants.

SAFETY & LIABILITY

During landscaping or maintenance works on the nature strip, the individual conducting the works is obligated to take all reasonable measures to prevent accidents and injuries to both those undertaking the works and the public using the roads and footpaths. Safety measures could include the use of high-visibility temporary fencing, traffic cones, or signage to alert pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

Before commencing any digging, the resident must contact **'Before You Dig'** to determine the presence of any underground utilities or essential services at: <https://www.byda.com.au/>
The Colac Otway Shire Council will not be held liable for any financial penalties or injury incurred by the resident due to damage to underground utilities or services.










The resident should confirm with their insurer that they have adequate public liability insurance to cover any claims that may arise. The Colac Otway Shire Council accepts no responsibility for occupational health and safety or public liability related to works being carried out on a nature strip.



Nature Strip Planting

Suggested Species List

Colac Otway Shire Council recommends using native species in your nature strip garden to maximise the benefits of planting your nature strip for the environmental and aesthetic wellbeing of our shire. The following is a list of species that can thrive in nature strips and adhere to the nature strip planting guidelines. The below fauna key indicates wildlife that may be attracted to different plant species recommended.

 Butterflies such as Australian Painted Lady and Sword-grass Brown Butterflies.	 Large birds such as owls, kookaburras, butcherbirds and magpies.
 Invertebrate pollinators such as native bees, wasps, hover flies and ants.	 Reptiles such as skinks, geckos and goannas.
 Small birds such as wrens, robins and fantails.	 Frogs such as Pobblebonk and Spotted Marsh Frog.
 Parrots such as rosellas, lorikeets, grass-parrots and cockatoos.	 Bats such as microbats and Grey-headed Flying-fox.
 Honeyeaters such as spinebills, wattlebirds and honeyeaters.	Please note: All plant sizes listed in this publication are approximate. Environmental conditions will influence the final height and width of a plant.

Creepers



Bower Spinach
Tetragonia implexicoma



Excellent for stabilising sandy soil. Often scrambles over small shrubs providing shelter for small birds, invertebrates and small lizards.



Purple Coral-pea
Hardenbergia violacea



A very showy scrambling creeper with many forms and cultivars.



Running Postman
Kennedia prostrata



Trailing, hardy and adaptable plant.



Kidney-weed
Dichondra repens



An excellent plant to grow in shady areas of the garden. Can be used as a lawn alternative where traffic is light.

Groundcovers



Black-anther Flax-lily
Dianella revoluta



An attractive, easily maintained clumping plant. Plants sucker and can cover a large area over time.



Karkalla
Carpobrotus rossii



Very hardy and long flowering. An excellent soil binder on sandy, exposed locations.

Grasses and tussocks



Clustered Everlasting
Chrysocephalum semipapposum



A long-flowering plant with attractive contrasting foliage and flowers. A variable species with several forms.



Common Tussock-grass
Poa labillardierei



An attractive tussock that copes with a wide range of conditions.



Spiny-headed Mat-rush
Lomandra longifolia



A graceful tussock for difficult spots, embankments and gardens in general.



Pink Bells
Tetradlea ciliata



An attractive, delicate plant.



Weeping Grass
Microlaena stipoides var. *stipoides*



An excellent native lawn for light traffic areas. Can be mown or left to produce attractive weeping flowerheads.



Ruby Saltbush
Enchylaena tomentosa



An attractive and useful spreading plant, especially in dry conditions.

Small shrubs



Cushion Bush
Leucophyta brownii



The grey foliage is able to reflect light at night making this a useful plant for defining pathways.

Ferns



Common Maidenhair
Adiantum aethiopicum



An excellent garden plant for moist protected areas.

Tips to Help with Your Nature Strip Planting

Mulching

Spread a 25mm thick layer of mulch around your plants to retain moisture and suppress weeds. You can use materials such as pine bark, wood chips or 'bush mulch' that ranges between 6mm and 25mm in size. This type of mulch is preferred because it is heavy and won't be easily disturbed by wind and rain.

Planting Technique

Use hand tools to dig a hole slightly larger than the root mass of the plant, loosen the soil at the bottom of the hole, then gently tickle and loosen the base of the plant. Press the plant firmly into the hole, cover the root ball with soil, and apply mulch. Finally, water the plant thoroughly to prevent air pockets in the soil.

Weed Species

Ensure that the plant species you intend to use in the nature strip aren't environmental weeds. You can look this up in Colac Otway Shire Council's weeds booklets available at Council's customer service counters and online at: www.colacotway.vic.gov.au/Environment-Sustainability/Weed-management

Street Character

When planning your nature strip garden, consider the character of your street. It's always better if nature strips work together harmoniously. The following questions might help prompt thinking about this:

- How is the street used by people?
- What is its shape?
- Has anyone else already created a nature strip garden?
- Would your neighbours be interested in working together?
- Is the nature strip your are planning going to include native or exotic plants?

DRAFT

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Phone:

03 5232 9400

Colac Customer Service Centre

2-6 Rae Street, Colac

Open:

Monday - Friday 8:30am - 5pm

Apollo Bay Customer Service Centre

100 Great Ocean Road, Apollo Bay

Open:

7-days a week, 9am - 5pm

For callers who have a hearing, speech or communication impairment, and for text telephone or modem callers, use our National Relay Service on 133677



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