



BOROONDARA
City of Harmony

Naturestrip Guidelines

December 2015

Renovation and maintenance of naturestrips in Boroondara



Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Basic functions of a naturestrip	2
3	Additional benefits of naturestrips	2
4	Who is responsible for maintaining naturestrips?	3
5	General guidelines for naturestrip landscaping	4
6	Options for your naturestrip renovation	5
7	What is not permitted on naturestrips?	9
8	Applying for a permit	10
9	Related reading	10

The 2015 Naturestrip Guidelines were updated by Council's Environment and Sustainable Living Department and Parks and Gardens Departments. Minor structural updates were made to this document in February 2017. This document replaces Council's 2010 Naturestrip Guidelines.

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Images: Native Seeds Pty Ltd., Ian Moodie, Colleen Miller

1

Introduction

Naturestrips account for a surprising amount of public land within Boroondara. They play a range of important functions — practical, aesthetic and environmental. Council is responsible for ensuring naturestrips allow for safe and accessible public use.



In Boroondara the most common type of residential naturestrip is mown grass, often with one or more street trees. This is Council's preferred naturestrip treatment and does not require a permit.

Council relies on the established community expectation that residents maintain their own naturestrips as neat and tidy.

For a variety of reasons, some residents are interested in renovating their naturestrip, and may wish to convert it from a conventional mown grass naturestrip to an alternative landscape treatment. The motivation(s) behind a naturestrip renovation can vary, for example:

- to replace grass that is failing or performing poorly
- to beautify and bring visual interest to the naturestrip
- to avoid the maintenance of regular mowing
- to support local biodiversity by planting indigenous or native plants
- to avoid or minimise the need for watering, herbicide or pesticide use.

If appropriately planned and carried out, alternative naturestrip treatments can be practical, beautiful and require (somewhat) less maintenance.

However, before changing a naturestrip to anything other than mown grass, residents need to apply for a Naturestrip Renovation Permit from Council, and to comply with these guidelines.

These guidelines explain:

- the core **functions and benefits of naturestrips**
- **responsibilities** of residents/property owners, Council and utility companies
- the potential for naturestrips (especially in streets near our biodiversity corridors) to act as habitat 'stepping stones' supporting local flora and fauna
- the **options and requirements** for residents wishing to renovate their naturestrip
- **how to apply for a permit from Council.**

2 Basic functions of a naturestrip

Naturestrips refer to the area of public land between a private property boundary and the road kerb or gutter. The land is Council-owned and controlled, and technically part of the 'road reserve'.

This land is set aside for a number of purposes, providing space for:

- footpaths for pedestrians, prams, mobility scooters and the like
- people to get in and out of motor vehicles
- infrastructure for essential services such as water, sewer, gas, telephone and power lines (sometimes underground and sometimes above ground on poles)
- the establishment of street trees
- placement of waste and recycling bins for kerbside collection
- street lighting, bus stops, bus shelters or seats.

Naturestrips also improve public safety by enabling clear 'line of sight' between pedestrians, vehicle drivers and cyclists at driveways, road curves and intersections.



3 Additional benefits of naturestrips



Beyond the practical functions listed above, naturestrips can contribute to the development of good streetscape character, particularly through the growth of street trees.

Because naturestrips in residential areas are open and largely unpaved, they allow for penetration of rainwater and air into the soil, which improves soil health and promotes growth of nearby trees and gardens. Both street trees and the 'permeable' ground on the naturestrip act to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff and pollution that flows into local drains and waterways.

Trees and other naturestrip vegetation help shade and/or cool the local environment, making for more pleasant streets, especially during hot summer weather.

When carefully designed and maintained, naturestrips planted with indigenous or native plants can provide opportunities to support local biodiversity and enhance an area's natural 'sense of place' - this is especially relevant in streets adjacent to the Yarra River and Boroondara's other biodiversity corridors and nature reserves. See page 7 for details.

4 Who is responsible for maintaining naturestrips?

Unsure ‘who is responsible for what’? The key responsibilities of different parties are listed here.

Boroondara residents/ property owners:

- Council relies on the goodwill and established community expectation that residents will mow and/ or otherwise maintain the naturestrip abutting their property to present a neat and tidy street frontage.
- Residents are invited to help support the health of street trees by watering the tree(s) outside their property during dry conditions.
- Residents are not permitted to plant, prune or remove any trees within the naturestrip. To enquire about your existing street tree, or to request a street tree, please contact Council's Customer Service Centre on 9278 4444 or boroondara@boroondara.vic.gov.au
- If the naturestrip has been damaged by building works undertaken either on your property or an adjoining property, the property owner or builder is responsible for repair.
- Residents wishing to renovate their naturestrip - except for drought tolerant exotic and/or native grass lawn - must apply to Council for a permit.



Boroondara Council:

- Council is the ‘responsible authority’, and must ensure the condition of the naturestrip is not a risk to public safety (for example, as a potential fire hazard, or a pedestrian trip hazard). Council does not undertake renovation or maintenance (including mowing, watering or spraying with herbicides) of naturestrips unless there is a risk to public safety.
- Council plants, prunes and maintains all street trees in accordance with its tree management policies.
- Council issues permits for naturestrip renovations.

Utility authorities:

- From time to time, Council or utility authorities (such as Melbourne Water or your electricity network provider) will access naturestrips to undertake repair, maintenance or renewal works on services (for example, to stormwater drains, mains water or gas pipes).
- After these works are complete, the service authority is responsible for repair of the naturestrip to a ‘normal condition’ (generally topsoil with grass seeds, relying on residents to assist with watering). The service authority is not obliged to reinstate any alternative landscaping (such as groundcover plantings). Council is not responsible for replacing plants or landscape materials as a result of such works.
- Residents may be able to negotiate protection and/or reinstatement of naturestrip plants or materials with the relevant service authority.

5 General guidelines for naturestrip landscaping

Residents wanting to undertake a naturestrip renovation will need to comply with the following general guidelines.

Dial Before You Dig

All underground services (which may include gas, electricity, telecommunications, water supply, sewer and stormwater) are to be located prior to any works. Call 'Dial Before You Dig' on 1100 to identify service locations. This step is critical as failure to locate and protect underground infrastructure can result in serious injury (or even death) and/or disruption to essential services. Additionally, you would be responsible for the cost of repairing the damaged service infrastructure.

Be a good neighbour

Your naturestrip impacts on the amenity of the streetscape; so ensuring neighbours are supportive / accepting of your planned naturestrip landscaping will be important to maintaining good relations. Talk with your neighbours about your proposal and consider their feedback. Their views will be taken into account when assessing your permit request. You could also provide them with a copy of these guidelines.



Maintain safe public access

Ensure naturestrip vegetation allows easy opening of car doors and pedestrian access to the footpath. Where there is on-street parking, maintain a clear zone of only mulch along the naturestrip edge closest to the kerb/road (minimum 60cm wide). One or two flat 'stepping stone' pavers, laid flush with the ground level, may be used to help guide foot traffic through a planted naturestrip.

Care for your street tree

Any landscaping should support the ongoing health of your street tree (for example, maintaining organic mulch around the tree can help maintain soil moisture). Minimise soil disturbance within the tree's root zone by using hand tools rather than machinery if planting groundcovers and small shrubs.

Other considerations:

- Allocate space for placement of waste and recycling bins for kerbside pickup.
- Near driveways, street corners and intersections, take particular care to keep all naturestrip vegetation below 50cm in height to ensure good sightlines for road users and pedestrians.
- To support healthy waterways and local biodiversity, minimise or avoid using synthetic fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides.
- To minimise risk and inconvenience to people using the footpath and road, keep all plants and mulch within the naturestrip area itself (not spilling onto the footpath or kerb).
- Soil, plants and mulch must not cover or impede access to service pits.
- Only undertake landscaping works on your own naturestrip (directly abutting your property).

6 Options for your naturestrip renovation

For residents wanting to undertake a naturestrip renovation, there are a number of options available. Which option you choose will depend on the motivation(s) behind your project.

Drought tolerant exotic and/or native grass lawn



Native grasses such as Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia* spp.) shown above or Native Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*) are a low maintenance and drought tolerant option that also supports local biodiversity.

No permit required

If you are re-establishing a grassed naturestrip due to failure or poor performance of your existing grass, give careful consideration to your choice of grass species.

Choose drought tolerant or 'warm season' grasses as, once established, these will remain in good health with little to no watering. Use of certain native grasses can provide a soft lawn like appearance and drought

tolerance. Recommended native species are Weeping Grass (*Microlaena stipoides*), Kneel Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia geniculata*) and Clustered Wallaby Grass (*Austrodanthonia racemosum*). These species are indigenous to the area and require only periodic mowing.

No permit is required to establish or maintain grassed lawn within the naturestrip.

Alternative treatments

Permit required

Potential alternatives to mown grass are:

Option A Planting with groundcovers and/or low growing shrubs

Option B Permeable surface treatment of either organic mulch or compacted fine gravel (such as granitic sand or toppings).

These alternatives do require a permit but, if properly installed and maintained, won't compromise the public function of the naturestrip. If the requirements of either Option A and/or B are met, and your neighbours find the proposed change acceptable, then a permit will be granted.

Option A

Planting with groundcovers and/or low growing shrubs

Use of suitable groundcovers, tufting grasses, wildflowers and/or low growing shrubs within a mulched naturestrip can provide a soft and beautiful alternative to mown grass.

In particular, in streets near Boroondara's biodiversity corridors and nature reserves – such as the Yarra River, Gardiners Creek and Hays Paddock – planting naturestrips with locally native groundcovers and small shrubs can extend the natural landscape aesthetic and provide precious extra habitat for native birds, insects and lizards. See the breakout box on the following page for guidance.

Whether using native or exotic species, or a combination of these, appropriate plant selection is critical, and helps ensure the landscaped naturestrip is attractive and can be easily maintained.

Select plants that are:

- hardy and drought tolerant
- suitable for the climate, soil type and amount of sun or shade
- indigenous or Australian native groundcovers, grasses or small shrubs and/or low growing exotic perennials
- no more than 50cm high at maturity (to maintain pedestrian and driver 'line of sight').

You must avoid using any plants that are known environmental weeds, prickly or spiky, poisonous or a common cause of allergies.

It's also worth carefully considering the placement and spread of plants. For example, unless you have a large area to cover, avoid groundcovers that spread very wide and grow quickly, or you will need very regular pruning to keep the footpath and kerb clear.



Low growing, drought tolerant perennials are ideal plants for naturestrips.

Here are just a few examples of low growing indigenous and native plants suitable for naturestrips. See Council's Backyard Biodiversity booklet for further examples or visit a native or indigenous nursery for advice.



Tufted bluebells (*Wahlenbergia communis*) and sticky everlastings (*Xerochrysum viscosum*)



Cut-leaf daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*)



Common appleberry (*Billardiera scandens*)



The common brown butterfly (above) is a regular visitor to wildlife-friendly gardens in Boroondara.



Boroondara's network of biodiversity corridors are shown above. We encourage residents living near any of our biodiversity corridors, including the Yarra River and smaller creeks, to support local biodiversity by including indigenous and native plants in their gardens.

Naturestrips as 'stepping stones' for local flora and fauna

Naturestrips planted with indigenous grasses and ground covers can provide valuable habitat for native birds, lizards and insects especially in streets located near biodiversity corridors and bushland sites.

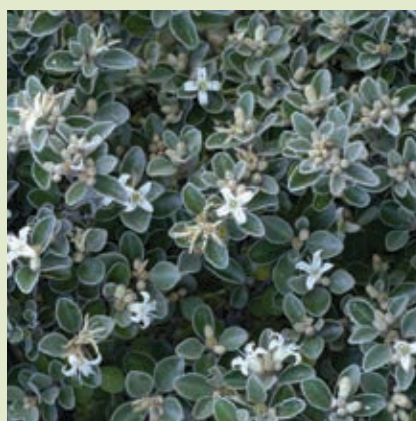
Across Boroondara there are 15 biodiversity corridors and several reserves that protect rare and threatened plants and habitats. Plants and native animals surviving in smaller, isolated sites are at risk of inbreeding and becoming locally extinct. The Yarra River, small creeks and the City's linear walkways act as natural biodiversity corridors. These corridors help to connect biodiversity sites and allow animals (and the seeds and pollen they carry on fur, feathers and skin) to move through the tree canopy, among bushes and along the ground in search of mates and new food sources.

Wildlife-friendly private gardens and naturestrips can play a role in extending existing nature corridors and creating new links and habitat 'stepping stones' for birds, insects and other wildlife.

Council's Backyard Biodiversity booklet provides tips for wildlife friendly and sustainable gardening. Visit www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/biodiversity to find out more.



Creeping boobialla
(*Myoporum parvifolium*)



White correa - prostrate form
(*Correa alba*)



Ground cover varieties of *Banksia*
(shown above) and *Grevilleas*

Option B

Permeable surface treatment using either organic mulch or compacted fine gravel

A low maintenance alternative to mown grass is to use organic mulch (such as recycled wood chips or bark mulch) to create a permeable treatment that will support the health of your street tree(s). To suppress weed growth, the mulch should be kept to a depth of around 7.5cm and will need topping up every year or so.

On level sites (not subject to erosion), use of fine gravel mulches such as granitic sand or toppings, lightly compacted to a depth of 7.5cm, will not require watering but will require periodic weeding.



7 What is not permitted on naturestrips?

Regardless of which of the landscaping option(s) (outlined on previous pages) you prefer for your naturestrip renovation, the following elements are **not permitted**:

- ✗ synthetic grass
- ✗ plants that are known environmental weeds, prickly or spiky, poisonous or a common cause of allergies
- ✗ hard landscaping elements including stakes, retaining walls, raised edging, planter boxes/beds, bollards or ornaments, protruding rocks or timber
- ✗ planting of fruit or vegetable crops. While there are benefits to using naturestrips to grow fruit and vegetables, there are also risks and for this reason this option is not supported by Council. Key concerns include damage to street tree roots from soil cultivation and health risks associated with potential soil contamination
- ✗ planting of trees (including fruit or nut trees)
- ✗ impervious or synthetic weed mat (for example, plastic sheeting under mulch)
- ✗ mulches such as straw, underfelt, scoria, blue metal, pebbles or other loose stones
- ✗ irrigation systems
- ✗ laying of additional concrete or asphalt
- ✗ altering the width of the naturestrip, road, kerb or channel
- ✗ interfering with the natural levels or drainage of the street (for example, through excessive mounding of soil, use of loose materials, or other changes that block drainage).



Landscape features including rocks, raised edging, bollards, ornaments and planter boxes are not permitted on naturestrips.

8

Applying for a permit

Residents wishing to renovate their naturestrip – except for drought tolerant exotic and/or native grass lawn – must be granted a permit before commencing work. This is a requirement under Council's Amenity Local Law.

Applying for a permit is important because it confirms, in writing, that you are aware of – and committed to complying with – these guidelines. This helps ensure the core functions and public safety of the naturestrip is protected. It also enables Council to ensure your direct neighbours find the proposed change to the streetscape acceptable. If there are objections to the proposed change then the permit application may be refused.

To apply for a permit, complete and submit the 'Naturestrip Renovation - permit application form' (to download, visit www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/naturestrips).

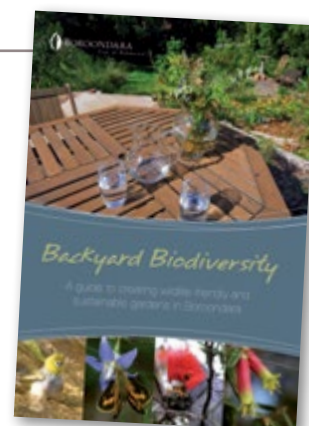
You should hear the outcome of your permit application within 21 working days of its submission.



Related reading

Visit www.boroondara.vic.gov.au/biodiversity for related City of Boroondara documents including:

- Guide to recognising and controlling weeds (brochure)
- Backyard Biodiversity - A guide to wildlife-friendly gardening in Boroondara (booklet)
- Urban Biodiversity Strategy 2013 - 2023



For further information,
please contact City of Boroondara
ph: 9278 4444