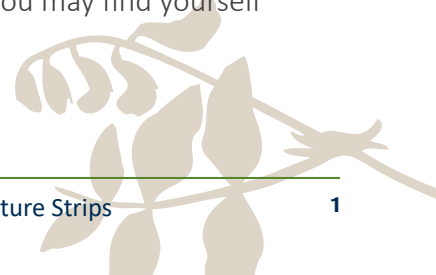




# Putting Nature back into our Nature Strips

Imagine the difference to our urban landscape if we replaced barren nature strips of lawn with long-lived, low maintenance indigenous groundcovers, wildflowers, and grasses. When you pack away the lawnmower and transform your nature strip with indigenous plants, you are providing habitat and food for urban wildlife, enhancing biodiversity, and improving local ecosystems. You are also helping water soak into the ground – making our rivers and bays healthier, and you are adding to your neighbourhood's green corridors which is vital for so many species.

Stephen Murphy from Recreating the Country describes a beautiful, individually designed nature strip as an organic form of street art that could define a street or municipality. And while you are out in your front yard planting and creating, you may find yourself connecting with your neighbours as your garden grows.





## Find your inspiration

The first step to creating your indigenous nature strip is to explore your neighbourhood and take note of plants that are thriving in gardens, parks and on the roadside – these plants are adapted to your local climate and soil. An indigenous nursery is also a great place to observe plant combinations and to see firsthand flowers, foliage colour and texture. When you are exploring your neighbourhood look at different styles of gardens – traditional designs with clipped plants, straight lines and repetitive planting or informal gardens with drifts of plants, wildflower meadows and soft grasses.

When starting a new garden or planting out your nature strip with indigenous plants, the best advice is to start small and keep it manageable. You may not have hours to spend maintaining your nature strip so consider replacing your lawn with long-lived, low maintenance groundcovers. Or if removing all the lawn from your nature strip is a big job consider removing a small area one by two metres and create a beautiful patch of wildflowers and indigenous grasses. Grow this small garden and then remove more lawn as your confidence grows and the plants begin to establish.



## Preparing your site for planting

When preparing your site, mow the lawn as short as possible and then put your mower away for good. The most effective way to remove lawn and weeds is to use a hoe or mattock. Invite your friends and neighbours around to give you a hand, put on a BBQ, bake a cake – it can be a big job! Once you have broken up the clumps of grass, remove as much topsoil out of the root system as possible – shake it, stand on it, use your shovel to break it loose or a hose to pressurise the soil – you don't want to throw away your topsoil in the green bin.

If your grass is deep-rooted or spreading through rhizomes like Couch or Kikuyu, or if you have compacted clay soil, you may want to use Solarisation to remove your lawn. Summer is the best time of year for Solarisation – check the weather and find a week of hot days and sunshine, cut your lawn short, water it, spread out a sheet of clear or black plastic and weigh down or peg the edges. The heat will cook and kill the weeds.

Finally, aerate your soil using a garden fork. Push the fork into the ground as far as possible, pull back on the handle until the soil opens and then repeat. If you have clay soil, make sure it is relatively dry before you start and always work away from the area you have tilled – you don't want to stand on and recompact your freshly turned soil. If you have heavy clay or compacted soil spread five to ten centimetres of organic matter such as compost, leaf mould and well-rotted horse or sheep manure on top of the tilled soil. These amendments will lighten the soil texture, add nutrients, improve drainage, and create pore space in your soil which is essential to plant growth.

## Tough, adaptable, and beautiful indigenous plants for your nature strip.

These are the top indigenous plants for low maintenance nature strips. All these plants will require regular watering once a week during dry and windy weather for the first year, but once established, they require little maintenance and will look spectacular year-round. All indigenous plants respond well to pruning as this mimics the grazing of wallabies and kangaroos. Pruning after flowering also encourages new growth and more flowers.

When selecting small plants for your nature strip always buy a minimum of 3 or 5 of the same species – plants don't exist in isolation in the wild. Mass planting indigenous plants will create a garden that looks strong, bold, and stunning.

### Groundcovers

#### **Inland pigface**

(Carpobrotus modestus)

#### **Ruby Saltbush**

(Enchylaena tomentosa)

#### **Running Postman**

(Kennedia prostrata)

#### **Creeping Boobiella**

(Myoporum parvifolium)



### Wildflowers

#### **Cut-leaf daisy**

(Brachyscome multifida)

#### **Common Everlasting**

(Chrysocephalum apiculatum)

#### **Native Flax**

(Linum marginale)

#### **Austral Tobacco**

(Nicotiana suaveolens)

#### **Tall Bluebell**

(Wahlenbergia stricta)



### Grasses

#### **Common Tussock Grass**

(Poa labillardieri)

#### **Knobby Club Rush**

(Isolepis nodosa)

#### **Slender Spear Grass**

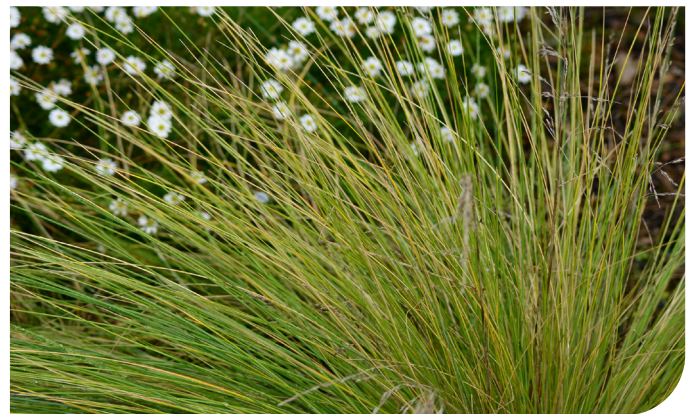
(Austrostipa scabra)



GARDEN SKINK

## Mulch for success

Your nature strip is likely to be an exposed site and mulching your indigenous garden will help keep weeds down, moisture in and will provide cover for insects and lizards. The two mulches that can be used on nature strips are Fine Compacted Gravel (e.g. Tuscan Topping or Lilydale Topping) or organic mulch. When applying mulch always moisten the soil thoroughly and lay your mulch thickly – seven to ten centimetres. Don't mulch right up to the stems of your plants as this can cause fungal disease. Leave a gap of four centimetres or more. For a nature strip, my preference is Fine Compacted Gravel, organic mulch tends to be flicked onto the footpath or driveway by birds, but ultimately the cheapest and the lowest maintenance mulch are plants. Plants are a living mulch that suppresses weeds, provides habitat and food for birds and insects, minimises fluctuations in the soil, and they are beautiful.



## Guidelines

Read through the Wyndham City Council's Nature Strip Guidelines and adhere to the required heights of plants on your nature strip, and requirements for leaving room for bins and pedestrians to enter and exit cars. By keeping within the government guidelines, you will create a beautiful wildlife-friendly and people-friendly space.

Recreating Country [www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog/putting-nature-back-into-the-nature-strip-part-2](http://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/blog/putting-nature-back-into-the-nature-strip-part-2)