

Nature Strip Planting Policy

Corangamite Shire

June 2023



**CORANGAMITE
SHIRE**

Council Policy

Nature Strip Planting

Introduction

This Policy is to define a clear set of objectives and maintenance standards for the planting of Council owned nature strips by adjacent property owners in the urban areas of Corangamite Shire.

Purpose and Objectives

This Policy acknowledges that well maintained nature strips add to the appearance and presentation of Corangamite shire and its streetscapes. They can bring economic benefits to businesses and property owners. Corangamite Shire encourages property owners to recognise the value of nature strips and to take pride in maintaining them. Nature strips are an integral part of the Corangamite Shire urban environment.

The objective of the policy is to ensure that if nature strips are modified, they are landscaped and maintained in a way that:

- Minimises the risk to the community.
- Provides for the unobstructed and safe flow of pedestrian traffic.
- Provides access for postal deliveries and utility service providers.
- Does not impede access to fire hydrants.
- Does not impact the safety of vehicles using the road.
- Does not impact on the proper function or provision of road and road related infrastructure such as kerb and channel, footpaths.
- Will not impact on overhead infrastructure such as utility services.
- Allows kerbside parking of vehicles and safe and practical conditions for emptying waste and recycling bins.
- Complements the existing streetscape.
- Are in keeping with heritage areas where applicable.
- Can act as additional footpath space when two or more people walk together or pass by.
- Provide space for street tree planting.

Scope

This policy covers all nature strips located in the urban areas of Corangamite Shire and its towns. The policy provides clear direction and specifications for property owners and Council in the alteration of Council owned nature strips, maintained by property owners.

Definitions

‘Adjacent Property Owner’ – the property owner who has a Council owned nature strip between their property and the road (Council or State Road).

‘Authorised Officer’ – refers to any officer employed with Corangamite Shire.

‘Nature Strip’ – a nature strip is an area of public land between the property boundary and the back of kerb or table drain, excluding any public pavement. In most cases a nature strip is grassed.

‘Risk’ – including safety, financial, time, quality or reputational risk.

References

Corangamite Shire Local Laws 2015

Urban Street Trees Policy and Procedures 2023

Policy Detail

Nature Strip Maintenance

Council does not carry out renovation or regular maintenance (including mowing and watering) of nature strips. Council greatly appreciates and encourages property owners or residents of abutting properties to take ownership for the maintenance of plants and any landscape features on the nature strip including watering as required and in accordance with water authority restrictions where / when in force, weeding, mowing and edging turf.

Residents may wish to be actively involved in the maintenance of street trees but this is ultimately the responsibility of Council. Residents are encouraged to provide watering to young Council trees to aid their establishment, however any other maintenance is the responsibility of Council and should not be undertaken by residents.

If a property owner does not undertake any maintenance of the nature strip, Council will implement one annual mow of the nature strip as part of its fire prevention program.

Common Nature Strips

Grassed nature strips remain the most common form of nature strip treatment within Corangamite Shire.

Written permission from Council is not required to maintain a grassed nature strip.

Street Trees on Nature Strips

Council is responsible for the planting, maintenance and removal of all street trees in the urban area. Trees are managed in accordance with the Urban Street Tree Asset Management Plan 2018-2028 and Urban Street Trees Policy and Procedures 2023.

Property owners are strictly prohibited from planting street trees in nature strips without written permission from Council. See *Urban Street Tree Policy and Procedures*.

Nature Strip Planting

Permits

A local law permit will be required for an individual to undertake planting activities on Council land. All permit applications must be on the prescribed form contained within the Council *Local Laws 2015* and a permit fee will apply.

Decision Guidelines

In determining whether to grant a permit, applicants must meet the following conditions:

a) Sizing and dimension requirements

The following requirements must be adhered to when property owners wish to alter a Council owned grassed nature strip:

- Nature strip plantings must be maintained to a maximum height of 500mm.
- Pedestrian access adjacent to the property boundary must be maintained. Pedestrian access must be minimum 2000mm width from the property boundary and minimum 2400mm height clearance. There are to be no plantings in this space. Grassed nature strip is acceptable in this space and is the responsibility of the property owner to maintain. This is to allow for potential future works by Council for excavation and installation of a 1500mm shared use concrete footpath.
- Nature strip plantings and any foliage must be planted and maintained to allow a 300mm clearance between the back of kerb and any plant or plant foliage. If no kerb is present, there must be a 300mm clearance between the boundary of road reserve and any plant or plant foliage. This allows access for services such as street sweepers, waste collection, kerbside parking and bike lanes.
- Planting within 10m of an intersection requires written permission from Council.
- Any plants around existing or established trees must be a minimum distance of 200mm from the base of the tree

b) Heritage Overlays

Road reserves are generally not included in Heritage Overlays unless acknowledging the significance of existing tree assets. Alterations to nature strips in streets covered by heritage overlays will be considered in accordance with Corangamite Planning Scheme.

c) Synthetic Turf

Use of synthetic turf is not permitted on nature strips within Corangamite Shire. Synthetic turf poses issues relating to access to assets for utility companies and Council. Potential damage may be caused to the synthetic turf during maintenance and waste collection activities leading to aesthetic issues as well as trip hazards and snake hazards.

However, if the application for synthetic turf is for a short-term application such as a display home and adheres to the following criteria, it may be permitted:

- The turf must be installed by a qualified and insured professional company; and
- The turf must be maintained in a neat and weed-free condition.

Council retains the right to request removal of turf in the case of non-compliance with this policy, at the cost of the property owner.

d) Coverage of Nature Strip

Total coverage of a nature strip area with an alternative to grass or plants is strictly prohibited. This includes full coverage with mulch.

Mulch is permitted around plantings only.

e) *Shrubs Around Trees*

Planting of shrubs around established trees is prohibited as the planting process can impact on tree roots. Any plants around existing or established trees must be a minimum distance of 200mm from the base of the tree. Existing plantings must be managed and kept below the maximum height of 500mm. Approval and ordering the removal of these plantings will be made at the discretion of Council's Planning, Environment and Local Laws Departments.

f) *Lawn Clippings*

Depositing lawn clippings in road reserves including nature strips is prohibited. This includes placement around street trees.

g) *Not Permitted on Nature Strips*

Hard surfaces such as concrete, pavers, asphalt or stepping-stones are not permitted in residential areas. If a hard surface is required for vehicle access purposes, a vehicle crossing permit should be obtained.

Small stones are not permitted in nature strips as they pose a safety risk. The risk associated with small stones includes the stones being thrown by other pedestrians or from activities such as whipper snipping. There is a risk of personal injury or property damage and therefore these items are prohibited.

Other requirements include:

- Irrigation systems are not permitted in nature strips.
- Stone, woodchips and crushed rock are not permitted.
- Rocks, bluestone pitchers, railway sleepers or retaining walls are not permitted.
- Letterboxes must be established on private property and suitable access to Australia Post delivery drivers must be maintained.
- Temporary or permanent electrical wiring must not be installed on to the nature strip (e.g. lighting of trees is not permitted).
- Edible gardens or edible plants or any sort are not permitted.

Edible gardens and plants pose a health risk to property owners and persons who eat the harvest from these plants. Council cannot guarantee factors such as spraying, contamination or brake dust and other road factors have not affected these plants and therefore to address the health risk of this practice, the planting of edible gardens is prohibited in Corangamite Shire.

If a property owner wishes to modify a nature strip with one or more of the prohibited items listed in this section (Not Permitted on Nature Strips), written permission is required from Council.

h) *Development Master Plans*

Master plans for new developments may include nature strip plantings. These plans will be assessed for suitability by Council's Planning and Environment Departments.

i) *Excavation, Cultivation and Dial Before You Dig*

Excavation and cultivation must be by hand as mechanical excavation or cultivation may damage infrastructure and services that may be underground. They may also cause damage to street trees and their root systems. Mechanical excavation or cultivation is strictly prohibited for nature strips unless a Road Opening Permit is obtained from Council.

Hand excavation and cultivation only will be permitted. As hand digging may expose some underground services, the property owner or their contractor must contact 'Dial Before You

Dig' on 1100 or via their website <https://www.1100.com.au/> to check the location of services prior to carrying out works.

The owner or occupier is solely responsible and will be held accountable for repairing all damage to underground and aboveground infrastructure, street trees and or street tree root systems caused by any landscaping works.

Utility companies, Council and Council's contractors are permitted to use mechanical excavation.

j) Utilities and Council Maintenance Work

Council and Utility companies that supply water, gas, electricity and telecommunications may require access to the nature strip to perform maintenance or capital works without notice. The utility companies and Council are required to 'make good' the nature strip following maintenance work but are not required to reinstate residential nature strips that have been landscaped other than in grass.

Reinstatement of gardens on nature strips is the sole responsibility of the property owner.

k) Risk Management and Safety

Corangamite Shire has a responsibility to provide a safe environment within urban and rural areas in the municipality. As the nature strip is public land, Council must be vigilant when it comes to recognising when a threat to public safety exists.

Any feature that is deemed by Corangamite Shire to be a risk to the public as a tripping hazard, a falling hazard, obstruction or other hazard, may be removed from the nature strip without consultation or warning at the cost of the property owner.

Non-compliance will be managed through the relevant Local Law process.

Planting within 10m of an intersection requires written permission from Council.

l) How Nature Strips Are Maintained

Nature strips must always be well maintained and kept in a safe condition by the property owner by:

- Ensuring that plants are pruned so that they do not protrude from private property onto pathways, driveways or within clearance zones specified in the *Sizing and dimension requirements* section.
- Keeping the nature strip free of weeds, rubbish and waste, any tripping hazards and any protruding objects.

m) Failure to Maintain a Nature Strip

Where a resident fails to maintain a nature strip modified in accordance with this policy and:

- The condition of the nature strip is a traffic or pedestrian hazard; or
- It does not provide appropriate pedestrian access; or
- It is a safety or fire hazard; or
- It interferes with the visibility of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians at intersections, curves in the road and near driveways; or
- Impacts unfavourably and significantly on the local amenity; or
- It poses a risk.

An Authorised Officer may enforce the requirements of this Policy under the relevant Local Law process.

n) Property Ownership Change

If a property with a modified nature strip changes ownership the existing owner is responsible for communicating the requirements of this policy to the new owner.

It is the responsibility of the property owner to maintain the modified nature strip at all times.

Policy Implementation

The policy will be effective from the date formally adopted by Council. Existing modified nature strips not compliant with this Policy may remain, however any Nature Strips containing alterations as listed in the *Not Permitted on Nature Strips* section, may be issued a notice to remove the item(s) if deemed to be a risk to the public or Council, and/or impede on pedestrians.

This policy relates to formalised nature strips in urban areas.

Review Date

July 2026

It is considered that this Policy does not impact negatively on any rights identified in the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

The Gender Equality Act 2020 requires Council to undertake gender impact assessments when developing or reviewing any policy, program or service which has a direct and significant impact on the public. This policy will not have a direct and significant public impact and a Gender Impact Assessment has not been undertaken.