



# Urban Nature Strip Guidelines

Adopted 11 August 2021





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## Purpose

Nature strips play an important role in the aesthetic, environmental and social health of our Shire. This document outlines the types, and benefits of nature strips, and is intended to offer residents and landowners in Baw Baw Shire guidance and information on their care and maintenance. The traditional, and preferred nature strip within our Shire consists of grass and a Council provided street tree. However, Baw Baw Shire Council does support the concept of alternative nature strip treatments in Council maintained Road Reserves. For modifications of Regional Roads Victoria Roads (Category 1), a planning permit application will need to be submitted.

This document provides guidelines for the establishment and maintenance of nature strips within urban areas. Urban areas are defined by the *Road Management Act 2004* as an area in which a speed limit of 60km/hr or less applies (not including temporary posted speeds) or where there is a building next to the road, or there is street lighting at intervals not exceeding 100m.

## Background

A nature strip is an area of public land within the Road Reserve that is between the property boundary and the back of the kerb. This excludes any footpath or assets such as driveways or utility service authorities' assets. In the circumstances provided for in these guidelines, nature strips can be modified by an alternative landscape treatment.

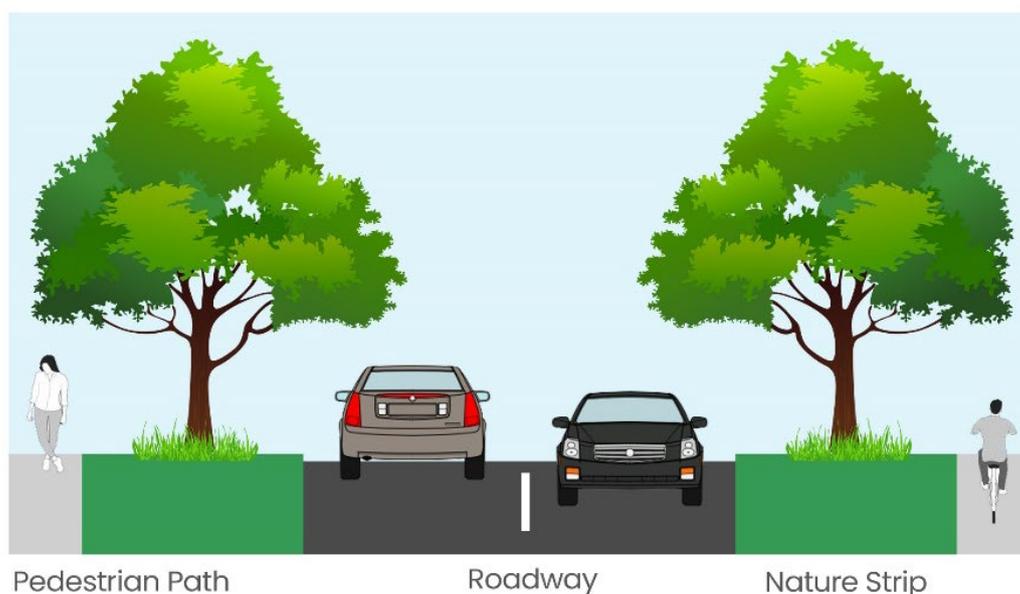


Figure 1: Typical Cross Section of Nature Strips

## The purpose of nature strips

Nature strips are an integral part of Baw Baw's environment:

- They provide a buffer between the private residential allotments and the public roadway, as well as a physical and visual separator between road and pedestrians.
- They are the location for utility service authorities such as water, gas, electricity, fire services and telecommunications, including NBN to install and manage their assets.
- They often provide a suitable space for the location of household garbage, recycling, and green waste bins.
- They allow for door opening space and pedestrian, pram, pusher and wheelchair traffic between the road and footpath.
- They allow for the visibility of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians at intersections or curves in the road and near driveways.

## Benefits

Nature strips offer a range of benefits including:

- Absorbing rainwater, which improves the health of soil and reduces stormwater run-off into the street.
  - Helping to cool urban areas in the summer, as they do not reflect heat like pavements.
  - Providing shelter for people and wildlife, especially on hot days.
  - Providing green corridors for native wildlife, like birds and insects, which can be further encouraged using indigenous plantings
- Improving the aesthetic quality of a street, which benefits property owners and businesses.

Altogether, nature strips help to create a safer, more attractive, and healthier environment for people to live and work in.

## Alternatives to grassed nature strips

Council supports beautification of nature strips with small plants and shrubs. A well-designed ground cover planting and mulch treatment can have lower maintenance requirements than grassed nature strips. There is, however, no landscape treatment that does not require any maintenance.

# Options for modifying a nature strip

## Replacing Grass

Grassed nature strips remain the most common form of nature strip treatment within Baw Baw Shire. The use of drought-tolerant grasses provides a low maintenance treatment which requires periodic mowing and weeding to maintain.

Replacing grass on a nature strip can be carried out without a permit from council. However, the planting of native grasses and other modifications must go through a permit process.



Figure 2: Grassed Nature Strip

## Approved Plantings

Alternatives to grass are planted and mulched nature strips. This provides a soft and visually pleasing alternative (when well maintained). This treatment involves the area to be mulched with organic mulch and is usually planted out with low growing plants specified on Council's Approved Plantings List. Only plants on Council's approved planting list are to be used (Refer to Baw Baw Shire Council's website, under Nature Strips). Plants are not permitted in the no planting zone of a nature strip.

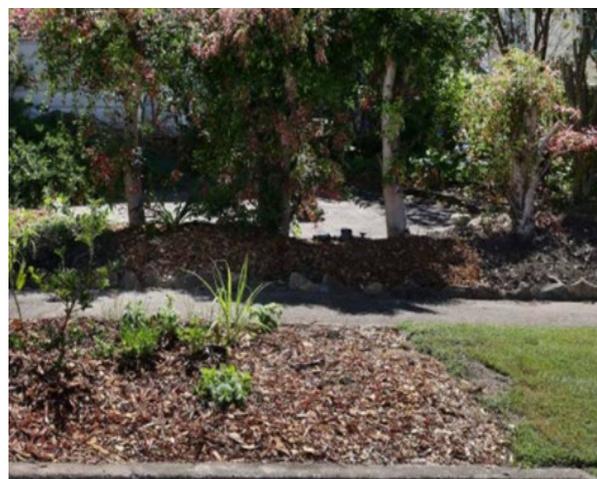


Figure 3: Planted and Mulched Nature Strip

## Permeable Surfaces

Permeable surfaces allow water to penetrate through to the ground and require minimal maintenance. Permeable surfaces such as mulch is a Council accepted ground covering option, provided that the area has natural plantings and/or street tree(s).

This type of modification may be considered by Council on a case by case basis.

Works must avoid any damage to street trees and their root systems, as well as any impact to underground services as outlined under the Conditions of Approval section.

Note: Synthetic turf or hard paving, such as concrete or bricks, cannot be used on nature strips as it stops water being absorbed into the ground. This increases flooding during high rainfall, increases surface temperatures on hot days and deprives street trees or other plants of water. It also impedes any necessary Council or other authority's maintenance works on the nature strip.

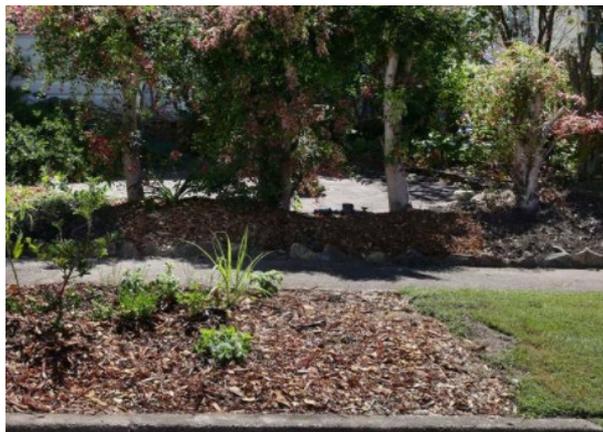


Figure 4: Accepted Permeable Surface

## Council Requirements

The basic guidelines for urban nature strips are as follows:

- Where no footpath exists in the nature strip, a minimum clear zone of 1.5m is to be retained for any future provision of footpath (no plantings in this zone. However, a permeable surface is permitted). Council will specify the location of this footpath and required width on a case by case scenario upon receiving an application.
- A minimum buffer zone of 500mm from the back of kerb is to be retained (no plantings in this zone. Permeable surfaces are permitted).

- A minimum buffer zone of 500mm from any existing footpath is to be retained (no plantings in this zone. Permeable surface permitted).
- A minimum buffer zone of 500mm from any driveway is to be retained (no plantings in this zone. Permeable surfaces are permitted).
- Any works carried out to a depth of no more than 75mm.
- Street trees cannot be planted by the applicant. A tree planting request can be lodged and will be assessed by Council based on the suitability of the site.
- Approved plantings are to be maintained below a height of 50 cm (excludes trees).
- Hard landscaping elements such as rocks, timber, retaining walls, ornaments must not be used.
- Mulch material must be kept stable and properly contained. Larger materials such as stones, crushed rock greater than 1cm, or chunky woodchips are not to be used.
- Irrigation systems must not be placed within the nature strip.

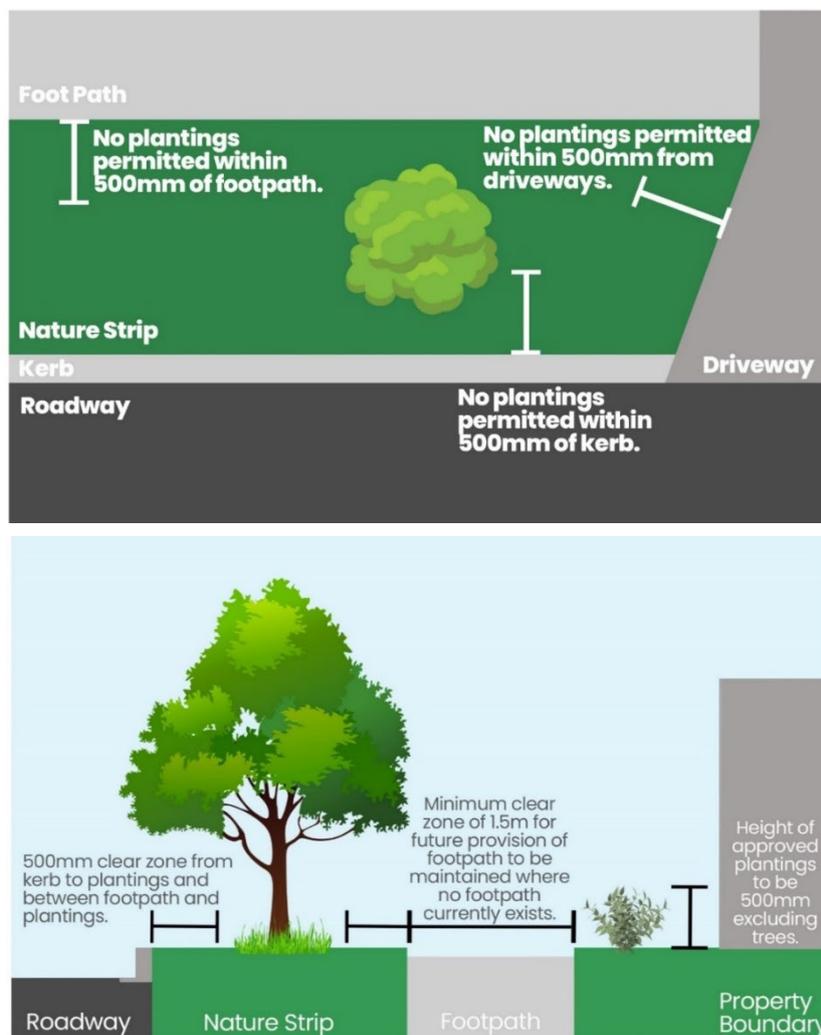


Figure 5 & 6: Required Offsets from Council Infrastructure and Driveways for Plantings

## Not permitted on nature strips

The following modifications are not permitted on nature strips in urban areas:

- Impermeable or hard surfaces such as:

Fine crushed rock



Bark



Bricks



Granatic sand



Steppingstones



Rocks



Community gardens



Synthetic turf



Gravel



- Additionally, concrete and asphalt are not permitted in residential areas.
- If a hard surface is required for vehicle access purposes, a vehicle crossing permit must be obtained.
- Council may consider other plants as suitable and in accordance with the approved plantings list on a case by case scenario, however Council will not permit the use of the following:
  - woody plants
  - prickly or spiky plants (such as roses or cacti)
  - shrubs that grow higher than 50cm and hide line of sight

- weed species (refer to Council's website under 'weed control')
- Residents are not permitted to damage, modify or remove Council planted street trees. If the removal or relocation of the tree is required, a permit may be required, and works will require Council approval and will be carried out by Council at the applicants cost.
- Irrigation systems are not permitted in nature strips.
- Letterboxes must be established on private property.
- Temporary or permanent electrical wiring must not be installed on or within the nature strip (e.g. lighting of trees is not permitted).
- As per the *Road Management Act 2004*, it is illegal to park on nature strips.
- Planting of vegetable gardens is not permitted due to concerns around soil, food contamination, the use of snail bait (which is highly toxic to animals), and potential use of herbicides or pesticides often used to maintain vegetable gardens.

## Excavation and cultivation

Excavation and cultivation shall be made by hand as mechanical excavation (bobcat/dingo) or cultivation (rotary hoe) may damage infrastructure and services that may be underground. They may also cause damage to Council street trees and their root systems.

Hand (spade or fork) excavation and cultivation is Council's preference. As hand digging may expose some underground services, the property owner or their contractor must contact ['Dial before you Dig'](#) or via phone on 1100, to check the location of services and provide evidence of this to Council prior to carrying out works.

The person carrying out the works is responsible for repairing and notifying the relevant asset owner of any damage to trees, infrastructure and assets caused by their landscaping works.

## Who Maintains Nature Strips

In an urban area, it is the property owner's responsibility to maintain nature strips. Council does not typically maintain (mow, weed or water) nature strips unless they are Council owned street trees, nature strips of Council owned properties or Council managed plantings.

## Maintenance Responsibilities

Following the beautification of a nature strip, residents are always expected to keep the nature strip in a well maintained and safe condition including:

- Plants must be pruned to ensure they do not exceed a height of more than 500mm to ensure no sight line issues are caused for vehicle traffic.
- Plants are to be pruned so that they do not protrude onto pathways, driveways or back of kerb and maintain specified buffer zones of 500mm.
- Council planted nature strip trees are not to be pruned or lopped by property owners, all maintenance of Council planted trees will be carried out by Council.
- The nature strip is to be kept free of weeds and rubbish.
- Where mulch is used, a cover is to be maintained over the nature strip. Mulch material must be kept stable and properly contained. No mulch spillage is allowed on the footpath, driveways or in the kerb and channel.
- The nature strip is to be free of any tripping hazards and any protruding objects.

## Utilities and maintenance work

Utility companies that supply water, gas, electricity, and telecommunications may from time to time require access to the nature strip to perform maintenance work. The utility companies are required to make good the nature strip following maintenance work but are not required to re-instate residential nature strips that have been landscaped other than in grass.

Council cannot guarantee that any of the maintenance contractors will replace plants and/or mulch to match the condition that existed prior to maintenance work. Council only require that nature strips be reinstated with topsoil and are seeded.

Council will not be responsible for replacing plants or landscaping because of such works.

## Public Liability

It is recommended that the owner/occupier extend their house and contents public liability insurance to include nature strip landscaping.

Residents are reminded that they plant the nature strip at their own expense and own risk.

## Enforcement

Baw Baw Shire Council is very much aware of the need to provide a safe environment within all areas of the municipality.

Council has the authority to remove any plantings or works that impact on the safety of the public or public services. The landholder will be informed by Council first and have the opportunity to rectify the plantings, before Council initiates any rectification works.

If the property owner fails to act, a delegated Council Officer will issue a 'Notice to Comply', directing that the problem be fixed by a specific date. Failure to act in accordance with a 'Notice to Comply' may result in enforcement action. This could include an on-the-spot fine for failing to comply with the Notice (5 penalty units or open court action (up to 20 penalty units). Any infringements would be issued under the Baw Baw Shire Council Community Local Law 2016.

## Requests to Consider Nature Strip Modifications

Applicants need to complete the "Application to Modify a Nature Strip" form.

Requests to modify nature strips can be obtained on the Baw Baw Shire Council website.

The application must contain a simple sketch plan that details the site including the following elements:

- Existing property boundaries, driveways, footpath, Council street trees (if any).
- Proposed modification plan including layout and schedule of plants.
- Flat areas for rubbish bins.

Alterations to nature strips, including any works, are not to occur until written approval has been issued by Council. Once approval is obtained, residents are required to obtain a "Works Within Road Reserve" permit' from Council as per the requirements of the *Road Management Act 2004*. Prior to commencing any work in the nature strip a '[Dial before you Dig](#)' is also required to determine the location of underground services within the nature strip area.

## Conditions of approval

Council will consider requests for modification or beautification subject to the following criteria:

- The beautification proposal is to be approved by Council prior to implementation.
- Owner/occupier must contact '[Dial before you Dig](#)' or via phone 1100.

- Hand, spade or fork excavation and cultivation will only be permitted.
- The owner/occupier is responsible for erecting safety fencing and signage during landscaping works.
- The owner/occupier is responsible for repairing any damage to infrastructure assets caused by any landscaping works.
- The cost of establishment, maintenance and renewal of the area and plants is borne by the resident or landowner.
- Council and service authorities reserve the right to access pre-existing and future assets. Disturbance resulting from access works will be reinstated to a neat finish only. Plants will not be replaced. Additional costs incurred due to beautification works shall be borne by the resident/property owner.
- Residents will be asked by Council to remove any beautification works that are inappropriate or not adequately maintained.
- Council reserves the right to remove any unsuitable plantings in any nature strips.
- Non land-owning residents need to obtain written consent from the landowner for the beautification proposal.
- [‘Works Within Road Reserve’](#) permit is obtained.
- It is recommended the Public Liability insurance of the property, be expanded to include nature strip landscaping.

## Existing modified nature strips

If your nature strip is already modified, please contact Baw Baw Shire Council on 03 5624 2411 to discuss how this can be brought to be compliant with these guidelines. Alternately you may wish to remove the modifications and revert to grass.

## Who to contact?

If you plan to do anything other than grow grass on your nature strip, you will need permission from Baw Baw Shire Council. A written application must be made using the “Application to modify Modify a Nature Strip” form.

This application is to be addressed to:

**Baw Baw Shire Council PO Box 304 Warragul Vic 3820**

Or via email at:

**[works@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:works@bawbawshire.vic.gov.au)**

## Related Documents

- Baw Baw Shire Council Community Local Law 2016
- Baw Baw Shire Council Road Management Plan
- Baw Baw Shire Council Asset Management Policy
- Road Management Act 2004
- Code of Practice Operational Responsibility for Public Roads
- Subdivision Act 1988
- Local Government Act 2020
- Climate Change Strategy
- Weed Management Strategy 2020-2025
- Indigenous Plants of Baw Baw Shire
- Approved Plantings List – Nature strip plantings

## Document details

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
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