



Cardinia Shire Council

Nature strip policy

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Unit:	Assets and Services

Contents:

Introduction	3
Policy objectives	3
Who maintains nature strips?	3
Approval process	3
Nature strip planting options	3
<i>Grassed nature strips</i>	4
<i>Permeable surface treatments – mulch</i>	4
<i>Approved plantings</i>	4
<i>Synthetic turf</i>	4
Not permitted on nature strips	4
Excavation and cultivation	5
Utilities and maintenance work	5
Risk management and safety	5
Existing modified nature strips	5

Introduction

A nature strip is an area of public land between the property boundary and the back of kerb, excluding any footpath or other assets such as driveways, utility pits, or fire hydrants. In most cases, a nature strip is grassed, but in the circumstances provided for in this policy, it can be modified by an alternative landscape treatment.

The policy only relates to formalised nature strips in urban areas, where kerb and channel exist.

It is important to note any utility service authorities such as water, gas, electricity, fire services and telecommunications all have access rights to the road reserve. Such service authorities may be required to dig up the nature strip periodically. Residents who modify their nature strip will not be compensated for any loss of vegetation or landscaping items.

Policy objectives

The objective of the policy is to ensure that if nature strips are modified, they are landscaped and maintained appropriately. At the same time, Council needs to minimise the risk to the community that could arise from the activity and provide for the unobstructed and safe flow of pedestrian traffic, access for postal deliveries and utility service providers, unimpeded access to fire hydrants, the safety of vehicles using the road, kerbside parking of vehicles and safe and practical conditions for emptying rubbish and recycling bins.

Traditionally, most nature strips have been turfed or grassed, however, some alternative landscape treatments are acceptable. The following provides some acceptable options and guidelines for nature strip treatments.

Who maintains nature strips?

It is common, accepted practice throughout Australia that the property owners or residents of abutting properties maintain the plants (excluding trees) and any landscape features on the nature strip. Generally, this amounts to weeding, mowing and edging turf.

Council does not carry out renovation or maintenance (including mowing and watering) of nature strips. Please note that minor changes in soil levels can be expected due to the nature of the reactive clay soils of the area and seasonal rainfall fluctuations.

Approval process

If you plan to do anything other than grow grass on your nature strip, you will need permission from Cardinia Shire Council. A written application must be made using the attached application form.

This application is to be addressed to:

**Assets and Services Unit
Cardinia Shire Council
PO Box 7, Pakenham Vic 3810**

Work is not to commence on any alterations to the nature strip without written consent from Council. Once an approval is obtained residents are advised to call 'Dial before you dig' (phone: 1100) to determine the location of underground services within the nature strip area. Prior to commencing any work in the nature strip a 'Road opening permit' must be obtained from Council as per the requirements of the *Road Management Act 2004*.

Nature strip planting options

Nature strip planting options include:

- grassed nature strips
- approved permeable surface treatments
- approved plantings
- synthetic turf.

Grassed nature strips

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

No permit is required to maintain a grassed nature strip.

Permeable surface treatments – mulch

An alternative to grass nature strips is a permeable surface treatment such as granitic sand or similar graded material. While this treatment does not require watering or mowing, it will require periodic weeding and maintenance. The laying of a material such as this requires more material, labour and skill than a grass treatment.

Two mulch types may be used:

- fine gravel mulches (75mm depth) such as washed granitic sand, Tuscan or Lilydale toppings
- organic mulch (75mm depth) such as a graded bark or multi-bark mix that is resistant to disturbance by wind and rain, as long as it is not directly adjacent to footpaths or kerbs unless fully planted out, and is properly contained.

Please note: river pebbles, polished pebbles, scourier, blue metal and other loose stones are not acceptable alternatives.

Residents must not modify public property (i.e. nature strips) without written permission from Council (see application form).

Approved plantings

Another alternative to grass or plain mulch, is a planted and mulched nature strip. This provides a soft and visually pleasing alternative (when well maintained). This treatment involves the use of the nature strip area as a garden bed with the area being mulched with organic mulch and planted with low growing native plants.

The basic guidelines are as follows:

- a minimum footpath width of 1.5 metres is to be retained
- a minimum buffer zone of 1.0 metre from the back of kerb is to be retained
- one approved street tree (refer to street tree guidelines)
- approved plantings are to be maintained below a height of 300 millimetres
- hard landscaping elements such as rocks, timber, retaining walls, ornaments must not be used
- mulch material must be kept stable and properly contained. Recommended treatments include granitic sand and finely ground organic mulch, such as soft fall material. Larger materials such as stones or crushed rock greater than 10 millimetres or chunky woodchips are not to be used
- irrigation systems must not be placed within the nature strip.

Residents must not plant trees or shrubs of any kind on public property (ie. nature strips) without written permission from Council (see application form).

Synthetic turf

Use of synthetic turf is discouraged on nature strips with Cardinia Shire due to the adverse affect this has on the environment. However, if the application for synthetic turf adheres to the following criteria, in some circumstances it may be permitted:

- the turf must be installed by a qualified and insured professional company
- the turf product used must comply with Australian Standard AS 4422:1996
- 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 resident's cost.

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.

- Irrigation systems are not permitted in nature strips.
- Rocks, bluestone pitchers, railway sleepers or retaining walls are not permitted as these items are all potential trip hazards.
- 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).

Excavation and cultivation

Excavation and cultivation must be 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 street trees and their root systems.

Hand (spade or fork) excavation and cultivation only will be permitted. As hand digging may expose some underground services, the property owner or their contractor is advised to contact 'Dial before you dig' on 1100, to check the location of services prior to carrying out works.

The owner or occupier is responsible for repairing any damage to infrastructure caused by any landscaping works.

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 mulch to match the condition that existed prior to maintenance work.

Council will not be responsible for replacing plants or landscaping as a result of such works.

Risk management and safety

Cardinia Shire Council is very much aware of the need to provide a safe environment within urban and rural areas in the municipality. As the nature strip is public land, Cardinia Shire Council must be vigilant when it comes to recognising when a threat to public safety exists.

Any feature that is deemed by Cardinia Shire Council 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.

Council will take appropriate action to rectify problems in relation to tripping hazards or safety issues. Council officers will write to the relevant property owner requesting that they attend to the identified problem.

If the property owner fails to take action, a delegated Council Officer will issue a 'Notice of non-compliance', requesting that the specific problem be fixed by a date (a 28-day notice is usually given).

Failure to take action following a 'Notice of non-compliance' can result in an on-the-spot fine (1 penalty unit) or open court action (up to 10 penalty units). All fines would be issued under Local Law No 10, Part 10, Clause 27. This applies to all non-compliant landscaping found in nature strips.

To comply with this policy, the property owner must provide a certificate of currency for their public liability insurance and agree to keep the policy current at all times.

Existing modified nature strips

If your nature strip is already modified, please contact Council's Assets and Services Unit on 1300 787 624 to discuss how this can be brought to compliance with this policy.

[Download a naturestrip amendment application form](#)