

## Nature Strips and their purpose

Your nature strip is the Council managed land between your property boundary and the road.

Nature strips form part of the road reserve. While they are generally under the management responsibility of councils, property owners typically mow the nature strip lawns that may be in front of their property.

The primary purposes of nature strips are to provide:

- safe areas for pedestrians that may include footpaths
- space for power/light poles and for underground services including electricity, gas, water, phones, etc
- a place for the collection of household garbage and recycling
- visibility for motorists and pedestrians at intersections, driveways and curves in the road

## Other uses for nature strips

Council usually plants suitable trees and shrubs that do not interfere with a nature strip's primary purpose. This is to complement the natural settings of a neighbourhood and for shade and beautification. Council maintains these plants.

Residents may plant their own nature strips, after a permit has been issued to them by Council. Residents then maintain these in a neat and tidy condition.

## Benefits of plants

Planted nature strips provide a range of benefits to the community and to the environment. They can:

- absorb rainwater
- reduce stormwater runoff
- cool an area
- enhance biodiversity and provide habitat for local insects and birds
- complement the natural settings of the neighbourhood such as street trees and residential gardens
- foster a sense of ownership within the local community
- visually soften the effect of the harder surfaces of road, footpath and driveway paving, fences and buildings
- provide opportunities for food production

## Guidelines for plantings

All nature strips are different which is why all applications are assessed individually before a permit can be issued allowing property owners to carry out their own nature strip plantings.

Council can only issue permits for nature strips along roads managed by Council and not along roads managed by State Government.

Typical requirements for a permit to be issued:

- primary purpose of nature strip is maintained
- access and visibility for vehicles and pedestrians is maintained
- typical vegetation clearances are
  - 0.75m to 1.2m from the back of kerb or open drain by negotiation based on speed and frequency of traffic (safety)
  - 0.9m from the property line where there is no footpath
  - 0.3m from the footpath (where there is one), boundary lines and driveways
- ground vegetation is less than 750mm in height
- existing vegetation is protected
- hazardous features are avoided like rocks, pavers, edging, planter boxes, stakes, nets and irrigation systems
- access is retained to footpaths, drainage and underground services

Requirements for tree planting:

- appropriate native, exotic, fruit or nut trees may be planted but must be spaced a minimum of 2.5m from driveways, the property line and other trees in the nature strip. It is preferable that trees are of a maximum height of 4 metres.
- to protect services trees must not have invasive root systems and should be low growing where overhead electricity lines or other infrastructure is present. A root barrier may be required.
- residents should be aware that council may prune or otherwise maintain any tree that it considers is interfering with the nature strip's primary purpose. Permit holders must undertake all maintenance from ground level. No access equipment such as ladders can be used.

Alternatively, residents can contact Council to see if the nature strip abutting their land is suitable for additional street trees to be planted. If so, Council will plant and maintain the street tree(s). A road occupation permit fee would not be required in this instance.

When selecting plants consider:

- that indigenous plants can enhance biodiversity and are more likely to provide habitat for local insects and birds
- environmental weeds are not permitted
- water restrictions apply regularly
- nature strip soils can be contaminated and unsuitable for plants intended for eating

Removal of any plants or landscaping may be required for access to underground services. Replacement of these plants or landscaping will be the responsibility of the permit holder.

Some areas of Bass Coast Shire Council have streetscapes with landscaped areas. This is common in newer estates. We encourage residents to talk with their neighbours and consider their views prior to lodging an application to plant on the nature strip.

“Dial Before You Dig” on Ph: 1100 will help to determine the location of underground services within the nature strip area. This will not give exact locations or depths of services. Specialist trades people can provide further advice. Excavation and cultivation needs to be by hand (eg using spade, fork, etc).

## **Discontinuing any private planting on a nature strip**

If a private planting is to be discontinued on a nature strip:

- advise Council that the permit is to be relinquished. Some areas may have specific planning controls so it is important to call Council before any plants are removed.
- remove private plantings and any landscaping
- dress the area with 50mm of seeded sandy loam topsoil

If you are moving house you can negotiate with the new resident to take on the permit. If this occurs please let Council’s Road Occupation Officer know the details. No fee or permit is involved. Alternatively, follow the steps above to discontinue the private planting.

If a private planting on a nature strip is deemed inappropriate or unsafe Council may instruct the permit holder to remove it.

## **Approval Process**

The permit to be obtained is a Road Occupation Permit.

Application forms and details of fees are available on Council’s website and from Council offices.

Applications must contain:

- a simple sketch plan of the site including property boundaries, footpaths, driveways, existing street trees and proposed planting (a sample sketch can be provided on request to help applicants)
- a list of the plant species and how many
- details of any other materials to be used

Council will assess each application on an individual basis and permits may be issued with or without conditions.

Failure to obtain a permit and comply with permit conditions to plant on a nature strip may result in penalties.