



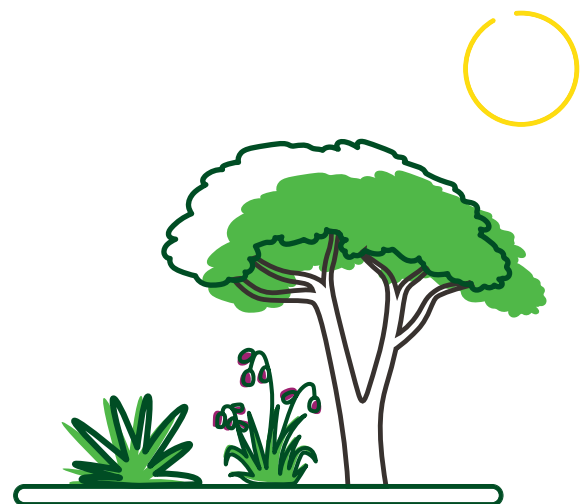
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Nature strip gardening: **Caring for Indigenous Plants**

A guide to caring for an indigenous and native garden on your nature strip.

Did you know that looking after indigenous and native plants is different from caring for European garden plants or vegetables?

If you're planting on your nature strip, it's important to understand the specific needs of indigenous and native species. With the right care, your garden will not only thrive, it will also support local biodiversity and create a more sustainable streetscape.



Wominjeka. Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their legacy and spiritual connection to the land and waterways across the City of Port Phillip and pay our heartfelt respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging.

Watering

Indigenous and native plants are naturally drought-tolerant and often grow best when the soil is warm and rainfall is moderate, typically during the warmer months.

Tip: The tips of plant roots have tiny hairs that absorb nutrients from the soil. If these root hairs stay too wet from frequent watering, it can slow the plant's growth. This is especially true for indigenous species that thrive in drier, warmer conditions.

By understanding their unique needs, you can help your native garden flourish!

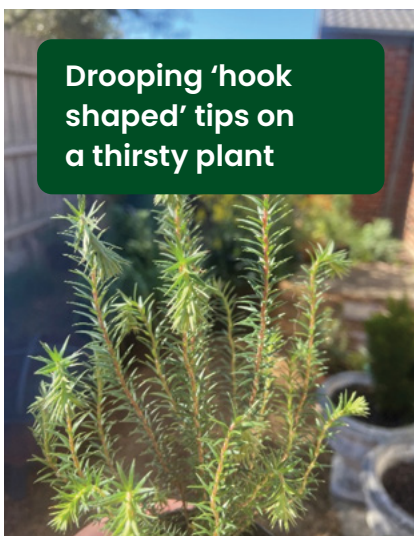
When should I water my plants?

It's important to understand your plant's specific needs. This information is usually available when you purchase the plant or can be found online.

A great way to tell if your plant needs water is to look for physical signs in both the plant and the soil. These may include:

- dry soil about 2 to 3 cm below the surface
- limp or drooping leaves and stems (see images below)
- foliage that appears dull or faded in colour.

By observing these signs, you can avoid overwatering and help your indigenous and native plants thrive.



Tip: Instead of watering your plants frequently with small amounts, aim for less frequent but deeper watering. This encourages roots to grow deeper into the soil, making plants more resilient and reducing the risk of overwatering. Deep roots help your plants access moisture during dry periods, supporting stronger, healthier growth.

Watering for newly planted plants

Before digging, gently move mulch away from the area to expose the soil. Plants should always be placed directly into soil, not mulch. Dig a hole slightly wider and deeper than the pot your plant came in. You can use the pot or a trowel to help measure the right size.

Newly planted indigenous or native plants need a little extra care as they adjust to life outside the nursery. These plants are used to regular watering and need time to adapt to natural conditions.

Start by watering them every 1 to 2 days during their first week in the ground. Then, gradually reduce the frequency to help them become more resilient.

Keep a close eye on your plants during their first summer, as this is when they're most vulnerable and need the most support to establish strong roots.

How much rain is enough to water my plants for me?

One of the best things about the cooler wetter months is free plant watering! Seasons can vary – how much rain does it take to properly water plants for you?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to watering, it all depends on your soil.

After it rains, take a moment to check your soil. Has the water soaked in properly, or is only the surface wet? This simple check helps you understand how your soil holds moisture and how much rain is reaching your plants' roots.

Knowing your soil is key to watering effectively and helping your garden thrive.

Fun fact: When watering your plants, watch how quickly the water soaks into the soil.

- If it drains away quickly, one deep watering is usually enough.
- If the water sits on the surface and takes time to seep in, keep watering slowly until the soil starts absorbing it more easily.

This helps ensure water reaches the roots where it's needed and helps you avoid over or underwatering.

Trimming and pruning

How and whether you prune depends on the type of plant, whether it's encroaching on public areas like footpaths or kerbs, and how tidy you want your garden to look. Some plants need regular shaping, while others can be left to grow naturally – it all comes down to your garden goals and the plant's behaviour.

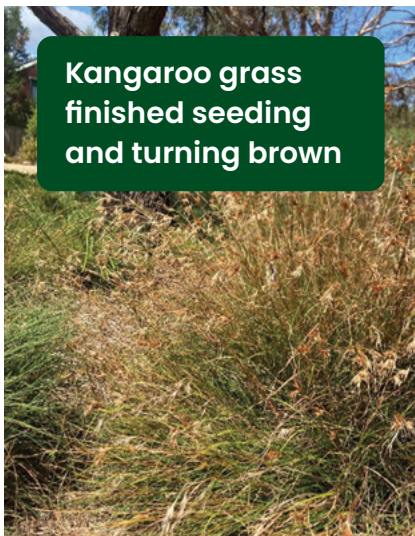
Trimming and pruning plants at least once a year can:

- encourage thicker growth that is less 'woody'
- encourage new growth
- promote flowering.

There are plenty of online resources to help you learn how to prune specific plants. When pruning, also consider the habitat your garden provides – for example, if you're trimming dried grasses, leaving the clippings nearby can offer useful nesting material for local wildlife.

Example: Trimming indigenous grasses

Native grasses such as tussocks respond well to being trimmed back once a year, just after they finish releasing seed in later summer. Grasses can be cut right down to the ground, just like how a kangaroo or wallaby would graze. This removes the flower heads and dry grass, providing opportunity for new growth.



Pests and disease

Pests and diseases are a normal part of gardening and often come and go with the seasons. Keep an eye out for unusual changes in your plants, such as:

- visible pests – check young leaves, undersides, and stem crevices
- chewed leaves, webbing, or slime trails
- discolouration or unusual patterns on leaves or stems
- slower-than-usual growth during the growing season
- changes in colour or patterns on leaves or stems.

What can you do if you notice a sign of a pest or disease?

- **Investigate** – do some research to identify the issue
- **Ask for help** – take a sealed sample to your local nursery
- **Treat carefully** – avoid harsh chemicals; try gentler, eco-friendly solutions
- **Consider the cause** – many pests and fungi thrive in certain weather, and seasonal changes may resolve the issue naturally.

Feeding

Feeding your indigenous or native plants is optional, not always essential.

If you'd like to give them a boost, use a low-phosphorus native fertiliser in spring, or apply well-rotted organic matter. However, if you're aiming for a low-maintenance garden, consider whether feeding is necessary. Regular fertilising can make plants more dependent on added nutrients over time.

Let your plants thrive naturally by understanding what they truly need.





More information



This information sheet is part of a series. Visit our website to access similar resources, including tips on plant maintenance and care portphillip.vic.gov.au/nature-strips

- 1 Prepare for Planting Indigenous Plants
- 2 Planting Your Indigenous Garden
- 3 Caring for an Indigenous Garden
- 4 Guide to Indigenous and Native Plants

Nature strip and street garden guideline summary