

ACTIVATING STREETS THROUGH NATURE STRIP PLANTING

JUNE 2026



Regen Melbourne acknowledges the traditional custodians of Greater Melbourne, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Bunurong and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

We pay our deep respect to Elders, past and present, and we acknowledge their living connections to land and waterways, including Birrarung Yarra River and Nairn Port Phillip Bay.

Written by Emily Tulloh and Nina Sharpe in June 2026. Illustrations by Emily Tulloh.

With thanks to the brilliant gardeners and groups who generously contributed their stories, perspectives and ideas to this report.

For any enquiries please contact nina@regen.melbourne

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Image credit: [Green Guerilla Group](#)



INTRODUCING THE NATURE STRIP (OR VERGE, OR STREET GARDEN...)

Our streets are uniquely shared spaces where our private selves meet the world, and community is formed. And nowhere is this more visible than on the nature strip: the piece of publicly owned land between homes and roads that residents are legally required to maintain.

Across Greater Melbourne, residents are already transforming these spaces from monoculture lawns into places for biodiversity, climate resilience and social connection. When taken together, these seemingly isolated patches of land have the potential to transform our streets.

In developing this report, we encountered diverse perspectives: from low-maintenance indigenous planting to approaches that centre colourful exotic species. These differences extend to language itself — nature strip, verge or street garden?

Instead of trying to agree on a single route forward, we use the terms interchangeably throughout this report. We do so as an acknowledgement of difference and an invitation to engage in dialogue, grounded in the shared drive to make space for nature and build community.

We see our streets as sites of democratic renewal: where we embrace diversity as an essential ingredient to enhance the vibrancy of our communities across Greater Melbourne.

The term “nature strip” is uniquely Australian and is most commonly used throughout the south east

Maribyrnong City Council, 2026; Bell et al, 2025

Approximately 22% of residential nature strips in Greater Melbourne feature citizen-planted vegetation

Marshall et al, 2019

Nature strips account for one third of green space in Greater Melbourne

Marshall et al, 2019

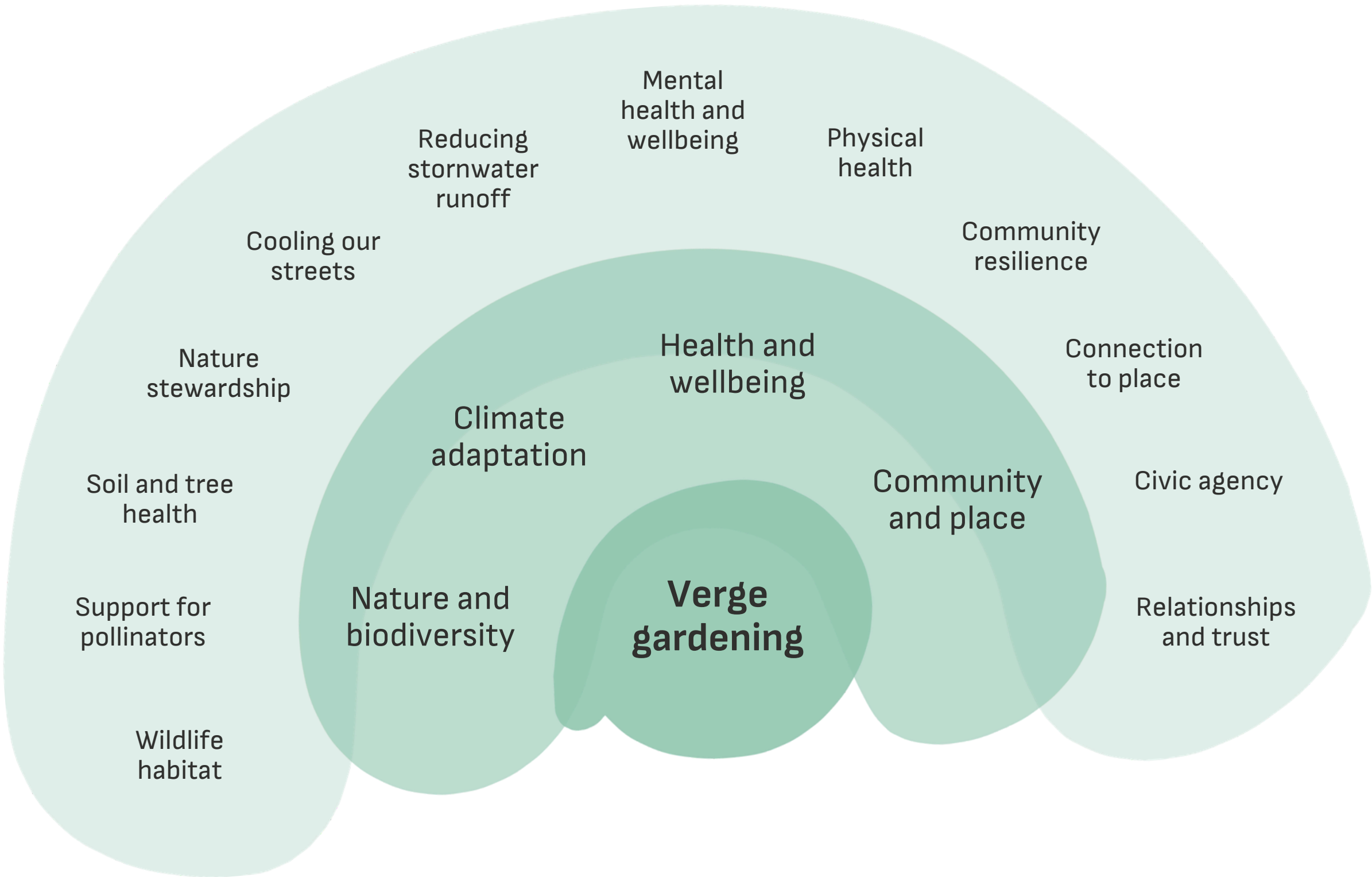


SYSTEMIC BENEFITS

Why verge planting? When taken together, what might seem like an isolated, individual action begins to add up to transformational change with far-reaching, systemic benefits. Research highlights nature strip planting as a strategic contribution that individuals can make to support biodiversity in Victoria ([Selinkse et al, 2020](#)).

Nature strip planting is a practical way that we can activate our street and move Greater Melbourne towards the safe and just space where people and nature thrive.

“When I was working out here during Covid, people would stop and we all got to know each other really well. Now, every year we have a get together. We have a community.”
– Lyn, Brunswick



SYSTEMIC BENEFITS

Nature and biodiversity

- **Wildlife habitat**

Increasing native planting leads to increases in native birds, bats and insects ([Threlfall et al, 2017](#)). When taken together, verges can function as wildlife corridors, allowing pollinators, small birds, and insects to move safely, connecting fragmented habitats and supporting ecological resilience.
- **Support for pollinators**

Resident-led nature strip planting has been shown to significantly increase the abundance and species richness of pollinators, such as native bees, within a single year of planting ([Bell et al, 2025](#)).
- **Soil and tree health**

Vegetated verges mean more plant roots and leaf litter in the soil. These break down over time, increasing organic matter, keeping soil structure intact, reducing soil erosion and enhancing soil’s ability to hold water and nutrients ([Dahanayake et al, 2024](#)). This nutrient-rich soil supports the health of street trees.
- **Nature stewardship**

Planting and caring for a street garden connects us with nature through hands-on interactions with local ecosystems. These experiences of nature increases the value we ascribe to the more-than-human world, with strong correlations to pro-biodiversity behaviours elsewhere in our lives ([Sollis et al, 2025](#)).

Adapting to climate change

- **Cooling our streets**

Our concrete city absorbs and retains heat, known as the ‘urban heat island’ effect. Increasing vegetation is one of the simplest ways to address this by absorbing sunlight, releasing water vapour and shading surfaces ([ACF, 2021](#)). While individual verges may be small, when taken together, the increase in urban vegetation is an essential part of how we need to adapt to climate change to keep our streets cool and livable.
- **Reducing stormwater runoff**

Compared with traditional turf grass, more densely vegetated nature strips can create deeper and more varied root systems that improve soil structure and water infiltration. These plantings can help slow stormwater runoff entering drainage systems, reduce pressure on stormwater infrastructure and contribute to lowering local flood risk ([Woodcock et al, 2013](#)).

Health and wellbeing

- **Mental health and wellbeing**

Access to green space is correlated with mental wellbeing, including lower levels of depression and anxiety ([Maas et al, 2009](#)). Increasing access to quality green space is especially important for children’s development and addressing social and health inequities in cities ([Alderton et al, 2022](#)).
- **Physical health**

Street gardens play an important role in improving air quality due to their proximity to traffic, especially important for people with asthma, babies and young children, and older adults. Greener streets encourage walkability and active transport, positively impacting public health including lowering heart disease and diabetes ([Creatore et al, 2016](#)).

Community and place

- **Relationships as resilience**

Verges are uniquely shared spaces that support informal interactions between neighbours, building local relationships and a sense of community ([Uren et al, 2015](#)). This social capital is a critical part of a community’s ability to withstand and rebuild after disasters ([Aldrich, 2012](#)).
- **Connection to place**

Street gardening can build our sense of place, responsibility and belonging, especially when native plant species are used (Adam et al, 2025). What’s more, social contagion plays a role, with neighbours more likely to adopt verge gardens where they are present nearby ([Marshall et al, 2019](#)). This can help strengthen our local identity and sense of community.
- **Civic agency**

Verge planting offers a practical way to act on systemic challenges. Engaging with this liminal space between the public and private, navigating permit processes and taking hyper-local action builds leadership skills and our democratic muscles to steer how our streets and neighborhoods evolve.
- **Relationships and trust**

Verge gardening provides a practical way to transcend institutional boundaries and strengthen the link between diverse council and community actors ([Ligtermoet et al, 2025](#)). Building relationships and trust are essential ingredients for the new types of collaboration we need to build a regenerative city.

SCALES OF ACTION: DOING YOUR PATCH

As part of our work on [300,000 Streets](#), we've been meeting people and community organisations who are already doing inspiring work to transform their streets.

From all corners of Greater Melbourne, we've collected street gardening stories across three different scales of action:

- doing your patch
- supporting community-level action
- starting with the ambition to shift larger systems.

Here we share some community stories, starting with residents who are taking action on their doorstep.

"I prefer to use 'strips for nature'. Because we know 'nature strips' have got nothing to do with nature currently. But if they're for nature in communities, that changes the thinking a bit."

– Annie, Hampton



Annie's story

Annie lives in Hampton, in south-east Melbourne, within the Bayside LGA. After moving to the area—and having previously planted out a strip for nature elsewhere—she saw street gardening as an opportunity to enhance local biodiversity and get to know her community.

Her ambition was to create an indigenous garden that was well adapted to local ecological conditions. As well as supporting local birds and insects, this approach would require less fertiliser, water and maintenance over time.

Annie's 12-month transformation began with understanding how the space was used, ensuring there was sufficient clearance for parking and car access. She explored different approaches to remove the grass and mulch, before planting out a diverse range of indigenous wildflowers and grasses.

This journey has not been without challenges. After a year, the site flooded, which stripped away topsoil and damaged plants. Annie advocates for the importance of peer networks, where neighbours can share knowledge, skills and time, and learn from each other's successes and challenges.

Annie sees the ongoing care for her strip for nature as an opportunity to stay connected to the space and engage in conversations with neighbours.

Annie's story on the [Bayside LGA website](#) has become its most visited page and has inspired other residents to get planting in their strip for nature.

Image credit: Annie, Hampton



Bil's story

Bil lives in Glenroy, in Melbourne's northern suburbs, and volunteers and works at her local neighbourhood house. She saw transforming her nature strip as an opportunity to enhance biodiversity, reduce the urban heat island effect, and cut down the time, effort and cost required to mow the grass.

Bil's first major task was to level the ground, given the build up of soil. Over several months during Covid, she used layers of cardboard to allow the grass to die off before removing. Through connections at her community garden, Bil sourced free mulch to cover the expansive 70-square-metre strip, along with a range of seedlings and cuttings for planting.

By planting a mix of native species sourced through her volunteer work with [TreeProject](#), using "chop and drop" weeding methods, and salvaging wood to create bug hotels, Bil has seen biodiversity flourish on her nature strip — from eastern rosellas to insects and mycelium.

Alongside the environmental benefits, Bil has found that the nature strip has strengthened connections with her neighbours. She has since shared her skills and experience by helping transform the nature strips of four neighbours for whom gardening is less accessible.

Bil sees strong potential for councils to support more nature strip transformations by offering grants and developing local walking trails that connect neighbours with each other and with their local environment.

Image credit: Bil, Glenroy

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ACTION



Union Street, Brunswick

Union Street in Brunswick, in Melbourne’s inner north, is home to a broad array of nature strips that reflect the diversity of the communities who live there and the different ways residents engage with urban greening.

This includes [Brunswick Communities for Nature](#), a volunteer organisation that supports residents to convert turf nature strips into native gardens through working bees, low-cost plant sales and knowledge-sharing. The group advocates for the use of indigenous species and ‘no-dig’ gardening approaches, aiming to create low-maintenance street gardens that support local biodiversity.

The street is also home to [Steph Ochona](#), a PhD candidate researching how interaction design can support nature strip planting and strengthen urban biodiversity outcomes. Their work explores how verge gardening can encompass individual activity and collective, community-supported practice through human-nature interactions. Using tools such as journalling, surveying and planting workshops, Steph engages neighbours to slow down, connect with nature and begin their own street gardening journeys.

Steph has begun organising nature strip walking tours to highlight the range approaches along Union Street—from gardens prioritising indigenous planting and pollinator habitat to others growing edible herbs for shared community use. Union Street is an illustration of how sharing skills and building relationships can increase verge gardening across a community.



Balwyn Rotary Club

[Balwyn Rotary Club](#) is a community group in the eastern suburbs. Inspired by Costa Georgiadis’ passion for pollinator-friendly verges, they see nature strip transformation as way to spark conversation and engage communities to take action on our intersecting climate and biodiversity crises.

Drawing on the diverse skills of the group – from garden design to project management – Balwyn Rotary work as an intermediary to remove barriers by:

- Drafting the Council permit application process on behalf of the resident
- Offering free native nature strip garden design or free tubestock
- Removing grass and preparing the ground ready for planting
- Coordinating a delivery of free mulch from Booroondara Council

Balwyn Rotary recognise there is inherent value in the *process* of developing a nature strip, not only the final product: building confidence, relationships and trust across institutional boundaries as the basis for future collaboration.

“The aim is to not only increase the number of biodiverse nature strips locally, but to build partnerships with other community groups and experts to both learn from others and share knowledge and experience.”

As part of the wider Rotary network, and having completed more than 60 verges, they are now sharing experiences and insights with other groups. In Geelong, [Highton Rotary](#) is working partnership with the City of Greater Geelong to transform more than 100 verges in 2026.

Image credit: Julian Meehan via [Balwyn Rotary](#).



Woody Meadow at Cuming Reserve, Yarraville

The [Green Guerilla Group](#) are a group of volunteers working in Yarraville, in the west of Melbourne. After noticing an under-used space in Cuming Reserve during the Covid lockdown, co-founders Sarah and David contacted Maribyrnong City Council to see how they could work together to create a community street garden.

The Green Guerrillas were supported by Council staff who connected with the [Woody Meadows](#) project from University of Melbourne, which aims to create low-maintenance, ecologically rich gardens using native and indigenous species. With a range of brilliant resources, suggested plant lists and guidance, Council gained the right to apply the Woody Meadows model to the patch in Cuming Reserve.

With a background in education, Sarah and David saw the potential to embed community greening by involving people in hands-on activities: from planting to ongoing care. They organised for students at Footscray High School to be involved in the planting as well as the plant ‘haircut’ one year on. Woody Meadows have a range of excellent resources that allow anyone to get started designing and planting a low-maintenance native street garden.

 [Woody Meadows Guidelines](#)

Image credit: [Woody Meadows](#)

A SYSTEMS VIEW

Melbourne Pollinator Corridor

Emma started street gardening in 2016 and immediately experienced its immense power and benefits. Recognising street gardening as an untapped goldmine for positive change, she founded Heartsclapes, now an emerging organisation connecting and strengthening urban communities of humans, fauna, flora and fungi through regeneration and conservation.

Heartsclapes' main project is the Melbourne Pollinator Corridor, an innovative, community-driven, ecology-led wildlife corridor made up of street gardens connecting Westgate Park and Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne. Emma designed the Melbourne Pollinator Corridor over 2 years with the input of 30+ scientists and specialists.

As of May 2026, the Melbourne Pollinator Corridor consists of over 11,000 plants in 50+ gardens (aiming for 200). The combined space covers more than six tennis courts over three suburbs and is managed carefully by over 70 fantastic volunteers.

The Melbourne Pollinator Corridor connects hundreds of thousands of people directly to nature and each other. It is a demonstration of what conservation in the inner-city looks like, how care and joy can be brought into public spaces and how designing for nature first in small spaces can pack a huge punch for nature and the surrounding human communities. Human benefits from this work include addressing ecological anxiety, isolation and depression, empowering women in the public realm and activating the area for locals and tourists alike.

The Melbourne Pollinator Corridor is now globally recognised and has influenced residents, councils and authorities around Australia and the world.

Emma's incredible vision and passionate work showcases how hyper-local action can shift larger systems.

 [Melbourne Pollinator Handbook](#)

 [Online Street Gardening course](#)

Top image credit: [Southbank news](#); all other images credit: Emma Cutting



WHAT IF... A VISION FOR CONNECTED CORRIDORS

These case studies and stories show how hyper-local action, starting on our verge, can begin to shift larger systems. They demonstrate how neighbours can respond to seemingly intractable challenges—and how this impact is amplified when people connect, share knowledge, and harness collective energy and ideas.

So what would it look like if this growing wave of grassroots action was matched by institutions and structures that reflected the same ambition for thriving biodiversity and stronger communities? What would an ambitious, Greater Melbourne-wide initiative look like if it were scaled to meet the size of the systemic challenges we face?

In the language of [Dan Hill](#), this is shifting from participatory to representative systems—where institutional powers and levers are aligned to deliver systemic change.

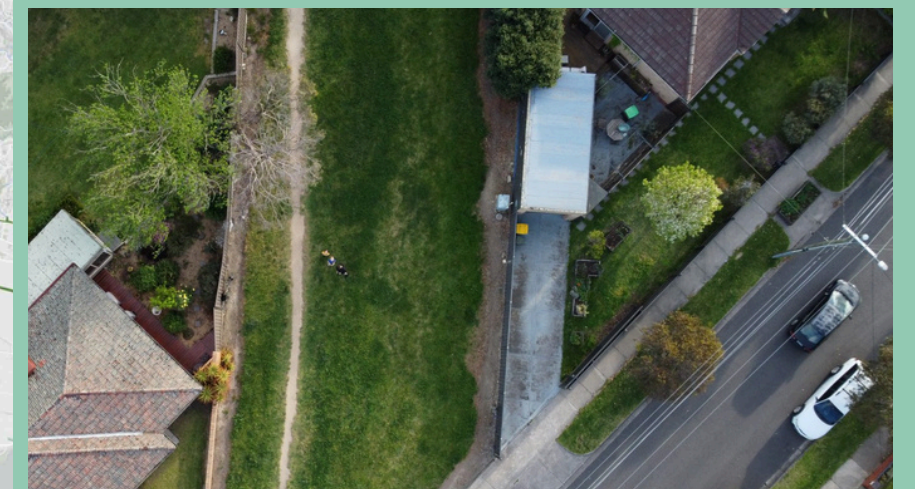
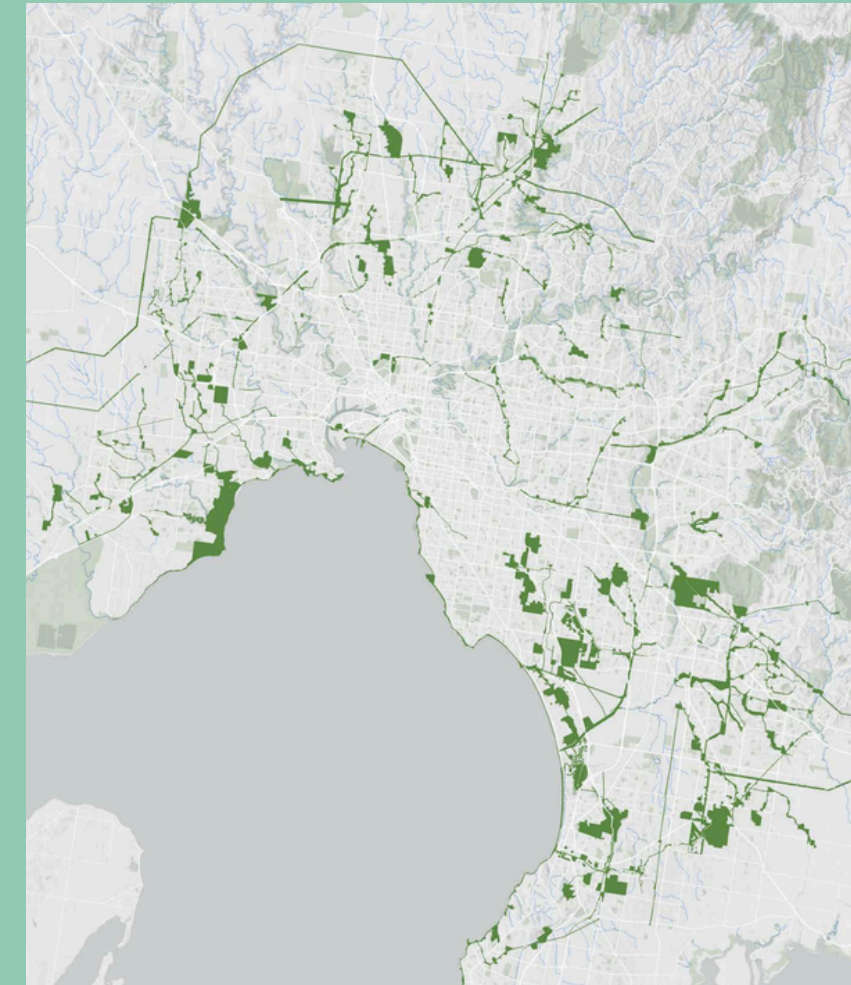
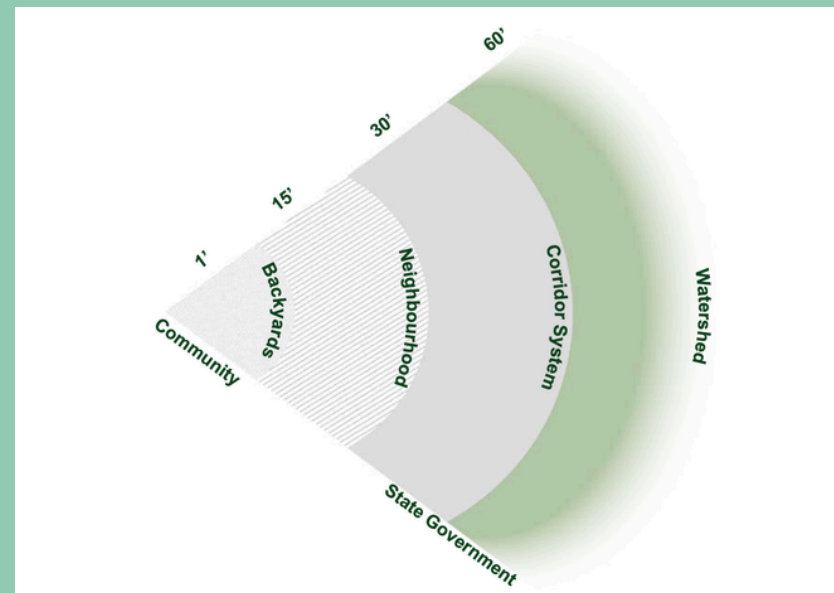
[Connected Corridors](#) is an ambitious initiative to transform 1,600km of under-utilised public lands across Greater Melbourne into a thriving network of ecological corridors. Spanning approximately 28,900 hectares this project represents one of the largest urban development opportunities in Australia.

The vision is to convert fragmented spaces such as powerline easements, road verges, train line easements, and pipe tracks into biodiverse corridors that reconnect ecologies and communities. By repurposing these single-use infrastructure sites, the project aims to deliver systemic improvements in community health, equity, and climate resilience, particularly in middle and outer-ring suburbs where high-quality green space is currently lacking.

Connected Corridors is a collaboration between [OFFICE](#), Regen Melbourne and the [University of Melbourne](#). Together with a diverse array of partners, this project is now ready to move into action and delivery mode.

[→ Read more: Connected Corridors](#)

Image credit: [OFFICE](#)



BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

So why isn't this happening everywhere? There is much we can learn from these stories of residents and community organisations transforming their nature strips in challenging cultural norms and building community capacity for street gardening.

What would it take to create the conditions for street gardening across Greater Melbourne, and support our nature strips to thrive as places of social connection, biodiversity habitat and climate adaptation?



Policy and process

One of the major challenges facing residents interested in planting out their verge is navigating council requirements. Some councils require formal, sometimes paid permit applications, while others allow street gardening if guidelines are followed. Others prohibit it entirely with concerns about trip hazards, overgrown vegetation, public liability and legal risk (Adam et al, 2025)

This fragmented approach creates bureaucratic complexity for residents and limits the sharing of information, resources and best practice between councils. It results in duplicated time and effort developing variations of similar policies and processes.

This limits street gardening to areas with enabling policies or to residents with the time and capacity to navigate local requirements. This risks reinforcing existing inequities in who can benefit from the environmental, social and health advantages of nature strip planting.

What if councils saw themselves as enablers and activators of street gardening, rather than risk managers or administrators?



Narratives and social norms

A groundbreaking Melbourne study in 2020 found that normative beliefs were the main cognitive construct affecting resident behaviour (Marshall et al, 2020). It suggests that the greatest barrier wasn't time, knowledge or cost, but the fear of what others would think.

“People like their clipped hedges and their green lawns... to convert a nature strip into native planting space requires a little bit of a leap over that cultural norm. It takes a little bit of courage.” – Annie, Hampton

Both storytelling and convening play important roles in shifting these cultural norms. There is much we can learn from Emma Cutting's powerful vision of creating a route for pollinators galvanising community action. Councils also have an important role in sharing stories of residents transforming their nature strips into rich biodiverse habitats to shift dominant perceptions.

How can we tell new stories and bring communities together to challenge dominant perceptions and make street gardening the norm?



Knowledge, skills and confidence

A study in Western Australia found that a lack of knowledge and education was a 'critical factor' limiting residents planting in their nature strip, both limiting uptake and causing unsuccessful efforts (Ligtermoet et al, 2021). Residents were seeking knowledge about species selection, design, planting, ongoing care and how to navigate permit processes.

Lack of gardening experience may further limit participation. A study from New Zealand showed how those with less horticultural experience were less likely to start, pointing to a potential 'cycle of nature disconnection' (Schindler, 2025).

We've seen how in Union Street a local convener can help build confidence and share knowledge. Balwyn Rotary shows how pooling skills across a community can grow a verge gardening across a suburb. At the heart of this is a recognition that strong relationships support us to learn from one another.

What if we valued the role of convener to connect those with interest and experience and build a movement of street gardening?



Practical support

Every nature strip is different, and many have site-specific constraints including soil condition and the location of utilities. Additionally the cost of plants, accessing deliveries of mulch and the physical labour (including removing grass, levelling ground, planting out and ongoing care) mean that nature strip planting is not accessible to all.

Councils can play a major role in providing practical support and incentives. A study in Perth mapped what these incentives could be including: offering rebates for installing a native verge, practical support to level the ground out, or providing topsoil, mulch and native plants for free (Ligtermoet et al, 2021). See the full list on page 68 here.

Balwyn Rotary demonstrates the role community groups can play to remove barriers by offering support to prepare the ground and providing free garden design, whereas Brunswick Communities for Nature provides access to affordable indigenous plants.

What incentives and support make street gardening accessible to our whole community?

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We can see that verge planting has widespread systemic benefits for community, biodiversity, climate, health and place. There is an opportunity for us all to play our best role in the system and grow verge planting across Greater Melbourne. So where to from here?

To create the wave of 300,000 regenerative streets across Greater Melbourne we must organise ourselves differently and create systemic responses to what are systemic barriers. We put forward these six areas of work to take forward.

As a peak body...

Establish a permit-free option for verge gardening across councils

Policy and process pose a major barrier for residents. Peak bodies can coordinate action across all councils in Greater Melbourne to offer a permit-free route to plant indigenous and native species in verges if local guidelines are adhered to.

Peak bodies can support councils to come together and identify how street gardening meets their shared goals around biodiversity, place and community. By pooling resources and developing a consistent approach, this would remove the postcode lottery and support all communities across Greater Melbourne to have equitable access to the benefits of street greening.

As a policymaker...

Remove barriers and resource community-led action

Policymakers have an essential role in supporting nature strip planting by removing barriers that residents face by offering a streamlined permit-free route to verge gardening if local guidelines are met.

Community groups and indigenous nurseries can often work more responsively than councils to support resident verge planting as they hold existing trust, knowledge, reach and connection. Providing ongoing, consistent funding to community groups and indigenous nurseries can support residents to access the education, resources, networks and support to get started with street gardening.

As a funder...

Amplify local action to city-scale transformation

This report highlights how street gardening is already happening across Greater Melbourne, but it's fragmented. Funders can grow the impact of these community-level initiatives through supporting ambitious, metro-scale projects that meet the scale of our intersecting climate, biodiversity and health crises.

Projects such as the Melbourne Pollinator Corridor and Connected Corridors show how a compelling vision can catalyse new forms of partnership across sectors. Strategic funding can support the coordination, networking and storytelling needed to bridge the gap between community-led action and systems change.

As a researcher...

Build the evidence base

The evidence is clear on the direct benefits of verge gardening, yet there is a major opportunity to expand our understanding of the long-term, systemic benefits across health, community resilience and place.

Imagine if policymakers, community groups, campaigners and advocates could demonstrate the long-term health and social impacts: the link between verge gardening and childhood asthma, or street greening and community resilience after climate-induced disasters. Strengthening the evidence base would help align funding and policy priorities towards long-term benefits for our communities and places.

As a community organiser...

Connect and convene

On a street level, organisers can continue their brilliant work of joining the dots between individual verges. We have already seen projects mapping and sharing skills and labour, organising walking tours and working bees, and developing a vision for place-based biodiversity corridors. These activities not only support local action but also strengthen relationships, build confidence, and build momentum for change.

By continuing to connect neighbours, share knowledge, and create opportunities for collective action, community organisers can help us move beyond isolated nature strips to a wider movement of locally-driven and interconnected projects.

As a resident...

Get started with nature strip planting

If you have a patch, start with a small corner and let it evolve! There are brilliant resources out there that can support you on your nature strip journey – from how-to guides to online courses, recommended species lists to rough designs that can be adapted.

As you go, share your story with friends, neighbours and your local council. It is these seemingly small hyper-local acts, when joined together, which become more connected habitats, cooler neighbourhoods and healthier communities. Verge planting offers us a practical way we can take action and begin to shift larger systems, moving towards 300,000 participatory and truly livable streets across Greater Melbourne.

RESOURCES

🎓 Courses and workshops

- [Heartscapes Online Street Gardening course](#) (self-led online course)
- [CERES](#) and [Maribyrnong City Council](#) run intermittent native nature strip design workshops

📖 How to guides

- [Melbourne Pollinator Corridor Handbook](#)
- [Shady Lanes: Verge Garden Basics](#)
- [Shady Lanes book: Garden on the Verge: A New Approach](#)

📋 Recommended species lists

- [Woody Meadow Guidelines](#)
- [Melbourne Meadows](#)
- [City of Melbourne – Urban Nature Planting Guide](#)
- [Hobsons Bay – Native Nature Strip Fact Sheets](#)
- [Gardens for Wildlife](#)

🌱 Indigenous nurseries

- [Gardens for Wildlife: Indigenous Plant Nurseries map](#)

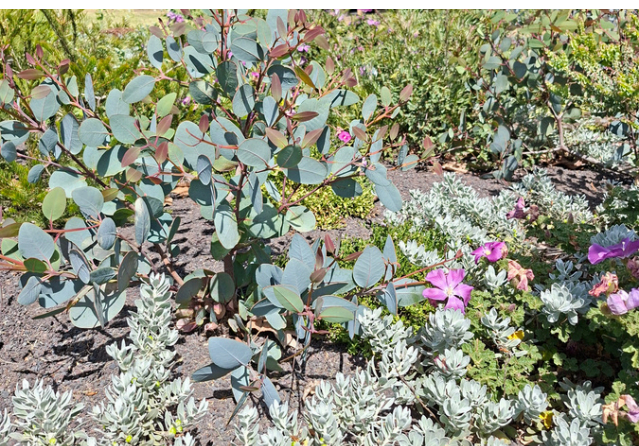
📺 Watch

- [My Smart Garden – Street gardens for habitat and biodiversity](#)

🎧 Listen

- [How can a verge become the spark that connects people, nature, and councils?](#)

Image credit clockwise from top left: Annie, Hampton; Woody Meadow at Cuming Reserve, author's own; [Balwyn Rotary](#); Union Street, author's own; [Green Guerilla Group](#); [Balwyn Rotary](#); Annie, Hampton



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