

Creating a verge

garden

Nature in Cities



What do you mean by 'verge'?

- Also known as a nature strip or street garden – we use the term 'verge' to refer to the strip of council-owned land between the front of a house or property and the kerb
- It is generally the local government's responsibility to plant, remove and maintain street trees, while it is the responsibility of the property owner (or tenant) to maintain the verge and keep it neat



Benefits of verge gardens

- Visual appeal!
- Can help cool down ambient temperatures of built-up areas in summer
- May improve building thermal performance, so you don't need to run the aircon so much
- Provide habitat for plants and improve local biodiversity
- Improve water efficiency and rainwater infiltration (important for cooling neighbourhoods)
- Foster neighbourhood interactions – both incidental and intentional, by bringing people outdoors and sharing ideas



Before you begin

- Regulations on street gardening vary council by council, so check with yours about their policy on verge gardens or street gardening
- It's worth your while - some councils offer incentives, such as plant subsidies or free mulch!
- Check in with your neighbours – the more people on board, the bigger impact you can have for cooling your neighbourhood and supporting local biodiversity



Designing a verge garden

Think about your front verge...

- What vegetation is currently available?
- Is it very simple in structure, such as open lawn and a few scattered trees, or is the site structurally complex with lots of layers of different vegetation e.g. trees and shrubs of different heights, grasses, ground covers, leaf litter/mulch?
- What do you want from your verge?



Designing a verge garden

DO

- Follow the council policy
- Choose small or low-growing plants for places where sightlines need to be maintained
- Safety first: 'Dial Before You Dig'
- Depending on local regulations, apply for a watering exemption for the time you will be planting
- Apply organic mulch
- Irrigate at ground level

DON'T

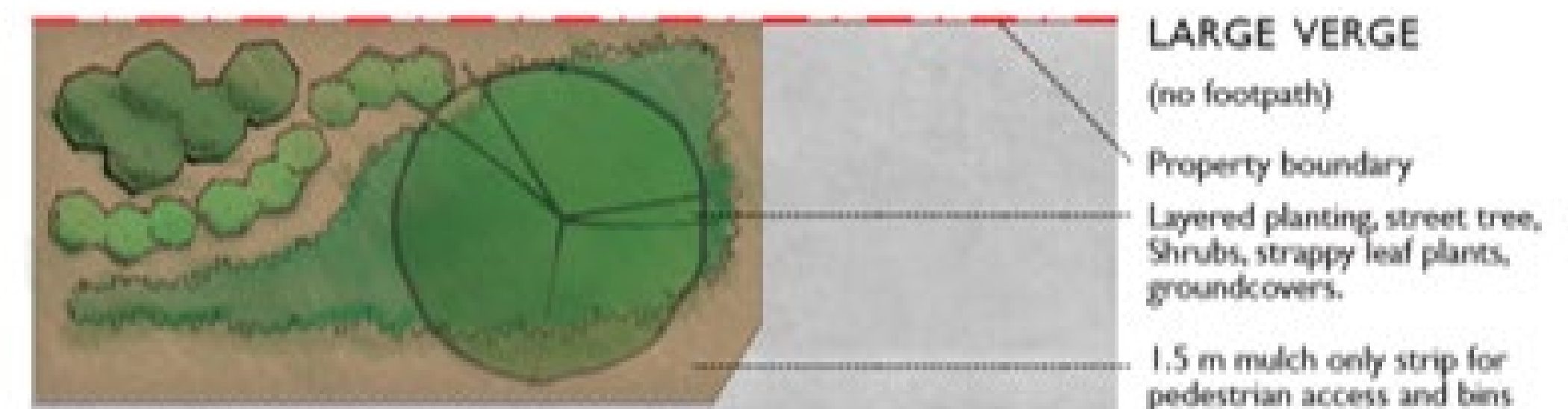
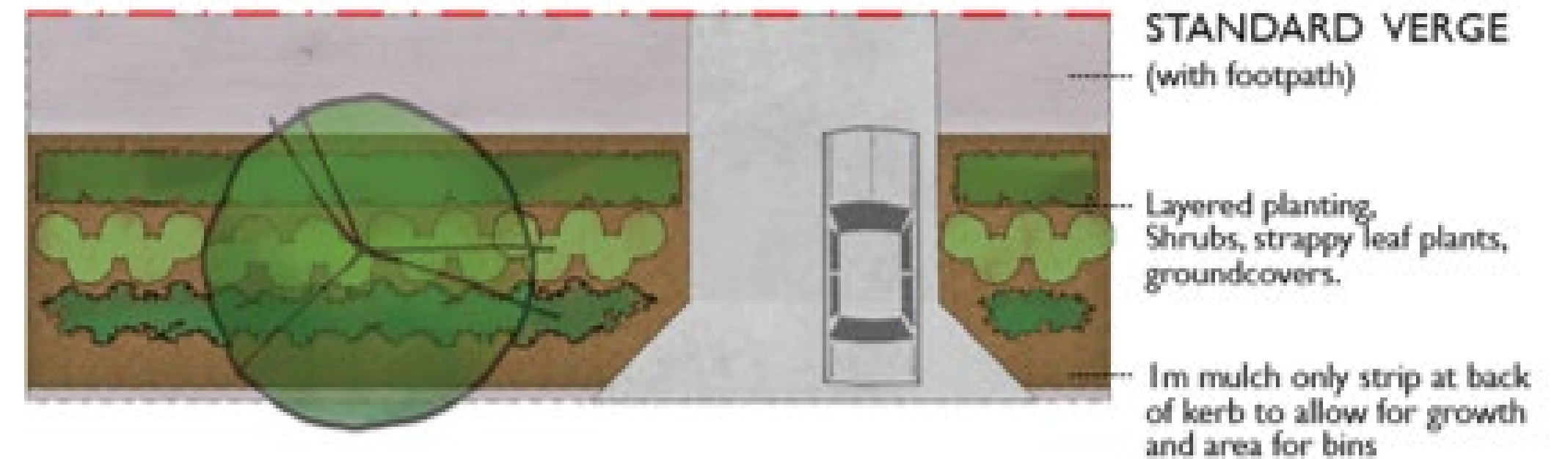
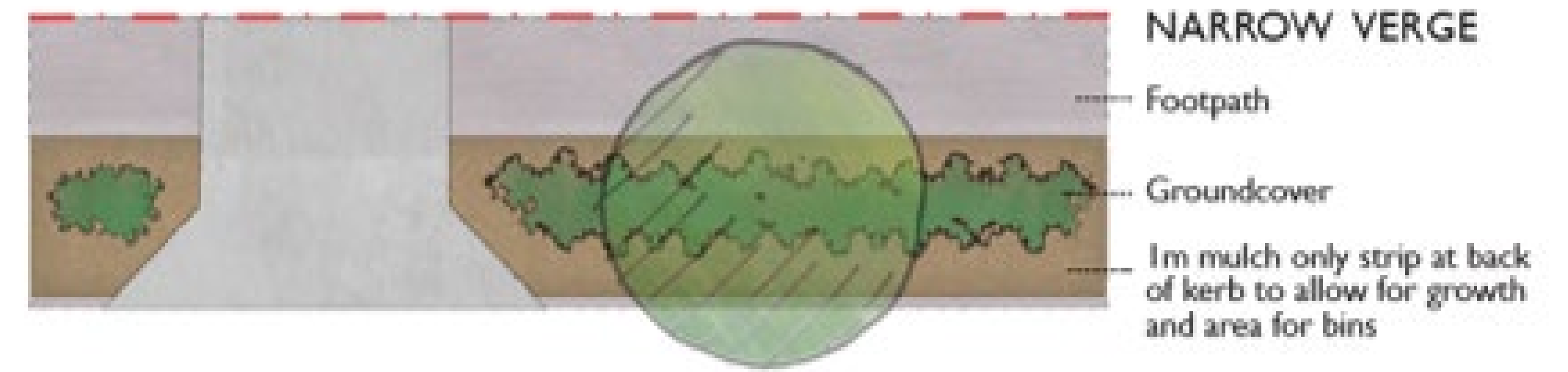
- Plant trees on the verge – you may be able to apply for a council planted tree
- Install fixed structures e.g. furniture or bollards
- Let 'perfect' get in the way of 'good'; it's better to start somewhere, than not at all



Designing a verge garden

Things to consider

- It might help to make a drawing to explore ideas, assuming a blank canvas apart from mature trees on your verge
- How do you currently use your verge? e.g. will you need a space for garbage bins, bus stop, pathway?
- Consider location, light and shade, slope, soil, plants



Preparing your verge garden

What about the weeds?

- Existing vegetation (even weeds!) can provide habitat for local fauna
- To reduce wind erosion and habitat loss, consider a gradual transition (i.e. removing and replanting one patch at a time rather than levelling it all at once)
- Identify your weeds, how do they spread? (bulbs, rhizomes)
- The way the weeds spread helps determine how you remove them: physical removal (pulling up or digging to remove bulbs), steam treatment, suppression with mulch



Tip: Start weed control at least three months in advance... weed removal is a marathon, not a sprint – expect ongoing activity and multiple seasons of removal



Preparing your verge garden

Create a strong foundation

Soil prep is the key to success. Check if your soil is:

- Sandy, loam or clay
- Alkaline or acidic (optimal pH is 6-7)
- Hydrophobic
- Exposed to high winds or salt

Depending on your soil, consider adding:

- Wetting agents (sandy soils) or gypsum (clay soils)
- Soil conditioners such as compost or worm castings
- Packaged organic fertilisers
- Mulch on top to reduce erosion and lock in moisture



Tip: Planting natives? Take care...
some fertilisers and manures do them
more harm than good



Preparing your verge garden

Choose your plants

- Local native plants are great – they are better adapted to our conditions, generally less ‘thirsty’, and are particularly well suited to supporting our unique native wildlife
- However, depending on your ideal garden, exotic ornamentals are fine (can provide shelter and food for pollinators and birds, for example)
- Do your research to make sure your plant choices are not invasive weeds in your area!



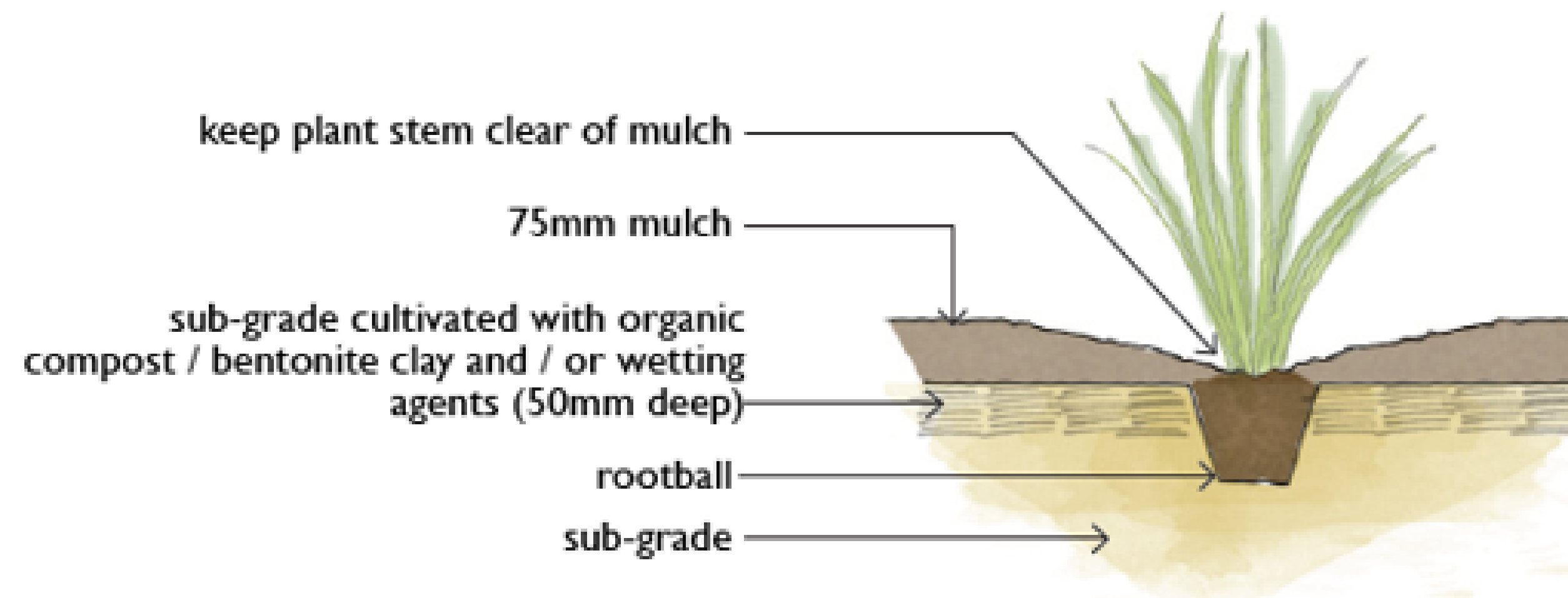
Tip: Match plants to effort... keep in mind how much energy you/your group can devote to the verge – check maintenance and watering needs for plants before you buy



Planting your verge garden

Tips for preparing and planting

- Ensure soil level is 75mm below path, so once you've added mulch the finished level is flush with kerb
- It is best to plant before the winter rains so the plants have time to settle in – avoid planting in summer
- Dig planting holes that are wider and slightly deeper than the rootball
- Fill in soil around the sides and tamp lightly down on top
- Immediately after planting, water in
- Mulch – but keep the base of the plants clear



Maintaining your verge garden

Watering

- Water at least weekly over the first summer
- Depending on your local regulations, you could apply for a water exemption during the first summer if needed
- After establishing, native plants will survive through most summers without extra water. Over-watering can be common!
- Water infrequently, but when you do, give plants a thorough soaking

Pruning and fertilising

- As a rule of thumb, do pruning or cutting back after flowering
- Follow council guidelines for maintenance, e.g. pruning for sightlines, paths and roads; and prune to ensure pedestrian safe access (~2m)
- Fertilise no more than once a year with a slow release formula



Turn your verge into a home

Verge gardens can provide habitat and a refuge for pollinators, such as birds, bees, moths, butterflies and beetles. You can design verge garden plantings to support a great diversity of life.

Habitat gardens for insects

- Native bees are mostly solitary, and some are stingless. All are non-aggressive and important pollinators. Read these ideas for [bringing native bees back to Australian neighbourhoods](#)
- Insects in general are attracted to small blue, purple and white flowers e.g. *Scaevola* spp. (Fan Flowers)



A native bee (*Leioproctus* sp.) on *Daviesia decurrens*

Credit: Fred and Jean Hort



Turn your verge into a home

Habitat gardens for birds

To attract feathered friends to your neighbourhood, think about what different birds need for shelter and food:

- Creating insect-friendly gardens can attract insectivorous birds like wrens
- Low-growing plants (shrubs and grasses) attract small ground-feeding birds
- Nectar-feeding birds like red and yellow flowers best
- As hollows get scarcer, nest boxes can encourage visits from species that don't build nests
- Bird baths are good for all kinds of thirsty fauna
- More [tips from Birdlife Australia](#)



Carnaby's Cockatoos drinking at a bird bath

Credit: C Groom



Turn your verge into a home

Habitat gardens for lizards

Skinks and lizards munch on invertebrates like snails and earwigs, which makes them handy for keeping numbers under control! Help them feel at home:

- **Basking and hiding spots:** Cold-blooded skinks and lizards like blue tongues need to bask in the sun to warm up. They also need places to hide during winter. Large rocks and logs are perfect for this.
- **Leaf litter/coarse mulch:** keeps soil moisture in, creates habitat for invertebrates and hunting grounds for lizards!



Credit: R. Davis





Looking for more inspiration?

- Look around at other verge gardens near you and see what is growing well for other people
- Compare notes with your neighbours about their verge gardens
- Ask at local nurseries for plant selection ideas
- Call your council, they may have someone on staff who can advise you
- Check out Gardening Australia's video on [starting a verge garden](#)

Get in touch

If you and your neighbours have been inspired to create your own street garden, or if you've spotted some great examples to share, we'd love to hear from you. [Send us an email](#) or tag us and #NatureInCities in your social posts.

We'd love to share our latest with you too. For stories from the field and other news, you can [subscribe for updates](#) or follow us on social media.

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This verge garden guide is brought to you by Greening Australia's Nature in Cities program, which is all about empowering communities to create greener, cooler places where both people and nature can thrive.

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