

Brunswick Communities for Nature (BC4N)

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Fiona McKinnon
Unit Manager Open Space Maintenance
Moreland City Council, 90 Bell Street, Coburg VIC 3058

Dear Ms McKinnon,

Draft Pest and Weed Management Policy DRAFT

Brunswick Communities for Nature (BC4N) is a group of volunteer locals continuing Adopt-A-Tree's and Moreland Energy Foundation's "Communities for Nature" program. The program converted grassed nature strips, into native gardens, to create a biodiversity corridor from Merri Creek to Moonee Ponds Creek in 2013.

We encourage planting of indigenous grasses and ground covers in private and public land as it provides the following benefits:

- reduces the total 'weed load' in the environment
- reduces the number of weeds that are highly allergic and that have impacts on human health
- drought tolerant planting, requiring no watering
- habitat and food source for indigenous insects and birds
- promote the utility and beauty of indigenous plants which are suitable for all landscape use
- low maintenance solution to regular mowing and poisoning of exotic grasses and weeds

Following are details of our planting techniques which provide a flexible alternative to chemical spraying of weeds.

We utilise 14 plant species which were selected by the Moreland Energy Foundation in consultation with the Merri Creek Management committee for their:

- conformance to Council Nature Strip guidelines of being no higher than 50cm
- year-round foliage and fruit, when planted together
- ease of propagation, planting and maintenance
- applicability to varying site conditions, i.e. rainfall, sunlight/ shade, soil

The complete list is here: <https://brunswickc4n.wordpress.com/4-guide/plant-list/>

The greatest failing of the 2013 project was the site preparation methods and ongoing weed management which resulted in very weedy nature strips that required extensive hand-weeding to restore. From 2014-2016 we have worked to refine our methods of planting and maintenance to minimise cost and effort. We believe that the technique outlined below is comparable to spraying in terms of cost and is more effective at controlling weeds in the short- and long-term.

The method involves:

- Using Weed Gunnel weed mat which biodegrades after approx. 2 years. This is not favoured for remnant vegetation re-vegetation as it slows down the process of natural seeding.
- Laying and pinning Weed Gunnel over existing plants and weeds. Trimming the weeds at the edge so that mat can be 'tucked' into the kerb prevents running weeds from escaping.
- Laying an optional layer of mulch over the weed mat. This does not change the efficacy of the weed mat but allows any weed seeds to die during the dormant phase.
- Leaving the dormant site for 2-6 months for the weeds to be killed. We do recommend occasional use of glyphosate (Roundup) to kill any escaping running weeds, particularly kikuyu grass.
- Planting new plants into slits cut into the mat with scissors, Stanley knife or using a Ryobi drill specially adapted by BC4N for the purpose of making multiple planting holes in hard soil.
- Weekly watering for the first month of establishment.

The method can be found described here: <https://brunswickc4n.wordpress.com/4-guide/>

While sites are optimally prepared in late spring and planted in autumn, the method is not seasonally dependent. This method is suitable for nature strips, kerb extensions, traffic islands, and garden beds. We have not used Weed Gunnell in tree planting holes, preferring to weed by hand and plant directly.

The most effective plants to use for complete grass and weed substitution are *Einadia nutans* ssp. *nutans*, Nodding Saltbush and/ or *Atriplex semibaccata*, Berry (Creeping) Saltbush. These plants:

- can be planted at 1 per square metre
- will compete with exotic weeds
- provide foliage coverage of approx. 10cm in height
- can be walked on
- have colourful fruit in spring and summer which is bird-attracting
- are low-allergy
- require no watering

Other plants from the list of 14 above can be used in various combinations, depending on the site conditions and requirements.

The benefits of the method outlined above are:

- longer-term solution to weeds which reduces the need for annual pesticide spraying
- comparable in cost to current activities over 2-3 years
- reduction in use of expensive pesticides requiring specific safe storage, use, and disposal which have negative environmental consequences
- biodiversity and amenity improvements
- can be used to extend and enhance existing investments in plantings, particularly in kerb returns
- opportunities for community involvement and engagement

In addition to the planting regime outlined above, there are opportunities to reduce Council maintenance costs by discontinuing maintenance of the plant species identified below. While these plants may recover, to varying degrees, from being pruned, pruning is not required to maintain the health or productivity of the plant. Pruning, and the removal of seeds, may reduce the chance for self-seeding reproduction. Self-seeding reduces the need (cost) to plant more desired plants and

remove unwanted weeds. Pruning detracts from the plants natural habit and reduces their naturalistic appearance. A perfectly healthy and attractive plant may look significantly worse after a 'haircut' it does not need, if growing successfully. These indigenous plants are evolved not to require any human intervention to grow and reproduce. There is no scientific evidence of benefits of pruning, only landscaping conventions.

- Correa. Rock correa (*Correa glabra*) and Native fuchsia (*Correa reflexa*) only need pruning if they exceed the desired height as they may grow as large as 1.5-2m high in ideal conditions otherwise pruning is not required.
- Lomandra. Wattle Mat-rush (*Lomandra filiformis*), Spiny-headed Mat-rush (*Lomandra longifolia*)
- Dianella. Black-anthered Flax Lily (*Dianella admixta*), Pale Flax Lily (*Dianella laevis*) The flowering 'antlers' may be removed once the fruit (seeds) are gone in early autumn for aesthetic reasons.
- Poa. Common Tussock Grass (*Poa labillardierei*). While the flowering spikes may be removed, retaining them and their seeds will increase the chances of the plant self-seeding.
- Themeda triandra (Kangaroo grass). The flowering seed pods are the plants significant aesthetic feature.

Brunswick Communities for Nature can assist Council in reducing its use of pesticides to control weeds by:

- piloting the planting method detailed above
- reducing maintenance costs by suggesting more selective and targeted maintenance strategies
- providing plant and weed identification materials and training to the community and Council staff
- engaging local communities and "friends" groups to take a more active role in maintaining their streetscape

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these initiatives further.

Sincerely yours,

Mel Yuan

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Brunswick