

### Waterwise Verge Planting

As space becomes a premium, newer housing developments are cutting back on that 'no man's land we call the verge. Yet in many older suburbs substantial chunks of land (often as much as 5 or 6m wide) are still council property, but the house owner's responsibility to maintain.

In the past, lawn has been the standard verge treatment. But in terms of maintenance and water usage it is a relatively high cost solution.

There are much more sustainable options, such as low growing, waterwise planting schemes. You also might like to include some hardstand for parking, such as a paved area, or where council regulations permit compacted gravel or large aggregate such as recycled brick.

It's best to check with your council before embarking on any verge renovation. The requirements are usually along the lines of low planting – under 400mm for at least 2m from the road. There are also issues of access and if your plant selection is not suited to foot traffic, you may need to leave a path through the planted area. This could be simply a mulched path, large format pavers arranged as stepping stones, natural rock or other suitable materials.

Some drought tolerant, spreading groundcovers, suitable for verge planting are:

- Grevillea 'Gin Gin Gem' – a low growing, bright green fine leaved grevillea with small red spider flowers. Aesthetically it is a great lawn substitute – though it can't be walked on.
- Eremophila 'Kalbarri Carpet' – Its silvery grey leaf is great for foliage contrast.
- Grevillea crithmifolia (Prostrate form) – A very dense, carpeting deep green grevillea with conifer-like foliage.



*Hemiantra Pungens*

- Hemiantra pungens – This grows flat to the ground and is slightly prickly, but very showy in flower. Mauve and white forms are available and give great summer colour.
- Grevillea 'Gilt Dragon' – With red flowers in autumn/winter on grey foliage, this is a very appealing, bird attracting grevillea growing to half a metre in height.
- Grevillea 'Royal Mantle' – another red flowering grevillea, ideal for large verges as it covers quickly.
- Adenanthos cuneata – a foliage highlight, it has a very pretty silvery leaf with reddish/pink tips.
- Myoporum parvifolium – a flat lawn-like cover that is drought hardy. Pretty white flowers on three forms; coarse leaf, fine and 'purpurea'.
- Also check out the ground cover banksias for their large flowers and sculptural leaf shapes. Prostrate ones include blechnifolia, repens and petiolaris.



*Conostylis candicans*

Grasses and tufting plants are a great choice for verge planting and look especially effective when planted en masse in sweeps across the verge. Some reliable, drought hardy species are:

- *Conostylis candicans* – with its grey foliage and bright yellow cottonhead flowers. (Local)
- *Dianella* 'Little Rev' – this very architectural little plant has stiff blue grey leaves and a dense habit.
- Dwarf *Lomandras* – Several lovely bright green, fine leaved forms of *lomandra* are now available.
- *Isolepis nodosa*- Dark green needle like leaves in an arching fountain like shape, resembling grasstree foilage. (Local)
- *Patersonia* and *Orthrosanthus* species – The Flag and Morning Irises have lovely blue or white flowers in spring. (Local)
- For summer colour, try some of the newer disease resistant, long flowering hybrid kangaroo paws.

Small clumping plants which will give some contrast in terms of form and texture include:

- *Leucophyta brownii*, the Grey Cushion Bush – A compact silvery mounding plant. There is also a cute dwarf form of this available called 'Silver Nugget'
- *Dryandra lindleyana* – This local plant has a delicate deep green saw toothed leaf and is pollinated by the Honey Possum.
- *Petrophile linearis* – the pink heads of 'Pixie Mops' are very pretty in spring
- *Verticordia chrysanthella* – with its deep green needle like leaves and very bright yellow feather flowers this is a very showy little plant.

When designing your verge, remember to...

- Check your council guidelines
- Ensure you use low growing varieties closer to the road
- Limit the number of species and plant them in bulk for impact
- Consider whether you need some hardstand for parking/kerbside collections
- Leave pedestrian access if necessary

Good plant selection will give you the best chance of success at greening up what is often a sadly neglected bit of turf. These plants are all easy to grow and many will attract birds and other wildlife. Don't forget to mulch thickly with a coarse mulch which will allow water penetration and deter weeds.

If you have been thinking about tackling that scruffy grass strip out the front of your place – maybe it's time to call in the Bobcat!