



Nature Strip and Street Gardening Guidelines

August 2022





Guideline Governance

Responsible Service / Department:

Public Space and Planning

Adoption authorised:

Council

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Endorsed department manager to make and approve document editorial amendments:

Manager Open Space, Recreation and Community Resilience

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01

Stakeholder review and engagement:

Community Consultation

Sustainability, Local Laws, Parks, City Permits, Accessibility/Inclusion, Traffic Management, & Public Space Teams

Relevant Legislation:

Road Management Act 2004 (Vic)

Local Law No 1 (Community Amenity) 2013 (City of Port Phillip)

AS1428.1: 2021 Australian Standards for Access and Mobility

AustRoads Guide to Traffic Management Part 6a, Part 6b



Urban Design Guidelines for Victoria

Associated Strategic Direction #:

Liveable Port Phillip, Sustainable Port Phillip

Associated instruments:

Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022 – 2032

Greening Port Phillip: An Urban Forest Approach 2010

Supersedes: Nature Strip Guidelines 2013

Review history:

Name	Content Manager File Reference	Date	Description of Edits
Nature Strip Guidelines	#	TBC	Adoption 3 August 2022

Definitions:

Name	Content Manager File Reference
Council	Refers to City of Port Phillip
Geotextile fabric	A tough fabric designed to retain soil, available from hardware stores
Guideline/s	Refers to the <i>Nature Strip Guidelines 2022</i>
Indigenous plants	Plants that are native to a specific area of the country
Key Boulevards	Streets which have additional design or protections in place. Full list available on our website
Legacy Gardens	Refers to gardens which are planted on nature strips (including tree plots) which have been planted prior to the adoption of this Guideline
Low Ground Cover	Ground covers are plants that that grow closely to the ground. Low ground covers grow less than 25cm high



Name	Content Manager File Reference
Natural Gardening	Gardening focused on improving the environment and using plants and materials which have no environmental detriment
Nature Strip	A nature strip is the area of public space between the boundary of private property and the road kerb but does not include the paved footpath area. Nature strips are usually grassed
Nature Strip Planting/Gardening	Plants or garden planted on a nature strip
Offsets	The area between two points where planting is restricted
Paved surface	Includes all non-permeable surfaces, including paving, concrete or asphalt
Permit	An official document issued by Council under Local Law that authorises a use or activity
Public Space or Open Space	Refers to land administered under the <i>'National Parks Act 1975, Forest Act 1958, Crown land (Reserves) Act 1978 and Land Act 1958</i>
Tree Plot	Some streets in Port Phillip are fully paved and do not have nature strips. Many streets will have gravel areas around trees which are there to support their growth, these areas are called tree plots
Tube stock	The smallest pot size available in plant nurseries, usually 5cm wide and 8cm deep
Urban Heat Island (UHI)	'A dome of elevated temperatures over an urban area caused by the heat absorbed by structures and pavements' Ref: http://www.environmentdesignguide.net.au/media/NOT11.pdf

Purpose

These Guidelines sets out how to plan, plant and maintain the nature strip or street garden outside your home or business.

You do not need approval or a permit to plant on the nature strip in front of your residential address if you garden in accordance with these Guidelines.

Council officers can be contacted for advice on planting on your nature strip or if you wish to deviate from the requirements set out below.

Scope

This policy applies to all planting in and on nature strips (including tree plots) located in public space managed by Council.

This policy does not apply to laneways, carpark, roads, parks, reserves, median strips, shopping strips or private property. These items are/will be covered in separate plans and guidelines.

What is a nature strip?

A nature strip is the area of public space between the boundary of private property and the road kerb but does not include the paved footpath area, kerb or driveway. Nature strips are usually longer grassed areas. Tree plots are small areas only surrounding trees and usually have a gravel surface.

Nature strips include essential above and below-ground public services including water, sewerage, gas, electricity, and communications infrastructure. They also provide space for rubbish collection.



Figure 1 Nature Strip and Tree Plot



Value of Nature Strip Planting

Nature strips are important green spaces that support street trees, provide permeable surfaces and can improve biodiversity if planted with a variety of plants, including local indigenous species.

When planted with a garden, nature strips can:

- Improve biodiversity
- Improve permeability
- Reduce the urban heat island effect
- Contribute to streetscape attractiveness
- Provide opportunities to meet community
- Provide activity through gardening
- Reduce the need for mowing.

Legacy Gardens

Many valued, biodiverse and beautiful nature strip gardens are planted within the City of Port Phillip. There is no expectation that these gardens be removed, even if they do not fully comply with the new guidelines.

Council is sometimes requested to investigate nature strip gardens where a safety concern has been raised. In these instances, Council works with affected residents to modify and maintain the gardens and ensure public safety. In rare situations where there is a continued conflict between the garden and safety, Council has the option to utilise the [Local Law](#) to issue orders and penalties.

Planning

Before starting your nature strip garden:

- Read these guidelines to understand the requirements of planting in public space
- Talk to your neighbours. Let them know what you are planning, ask if they would like to join in and talk through any concerns.
- Consider planting indigenous plants to promote biodiversity and improve habitat for rare and threatened species.
- Consider planting drought tolerant species and group plants with similar water needs together to reduce water use.
- For the best outcomes, nature strips will need to be prepared before they are ready for planting – this might involve improving the soil or removing grass.
- Moving soil or removing old plants could impact tree roots so consider how this will be done before starting.
- There may be additional requirements for nature strip gardens if you live on a key boulevard. These areas are listed on [Council's website](#).

- Remember to always consider your safety and the safety of others using the footpath, and particularly when planting near roads.

More information about suitable plant species is available on our [webpage](#) or in the gardening section at [local libraries](#).

Guidelines

Access and Safety

Nature strips are part of Council's public space network and are required to be maintained so that they are safe and accessible for everyone. When planning and planting your garden the following requirements must be met.

Footpaths

Footpaths need to be kept free of vegetation so everyone can use them. Vegetation that grows over the path can impact accessibility for prams, wheelchairs, scooters and people who might need assistance with mobility.

Guideline Requirement

- A 30 cm offset is required beside the footpath
- You can grow grass, a low ground cover or have mulch in the offset area
- All plants are trimmed back from the path edge.

Kerbs and parking

Nature strip planting can impact on safe and accessible access from the road to the footpath from car parking bays. Plants growing over kerbs can also impact on storm water flow.

Guideline Requirement (parallel parking)

- Keep a 50 cm offset beside the kerb clear
- Keep an area 1m wide clear every 5m (every car space) to allow people to access the footpath from the kerb
- You can grow grass, a low ground cover or have mulch in the offset and clear areas
- All plants are trimmed back from the kerb edge
- Keep a suitable area for rubbish bin collection.

Guideline Requirement (angled parking)

- You can plant to the curb
- Keep plants below 50cm in height within a 50cm offset from the kerb
- Keep an area between 60cm to 1.2 m wide clear every 5.5 m (or every two car spaces) to allow people to access the footpath from the kerb
- You can grow grass, a low ground cover or have mulch in the offset and clear area
- All plants are trimmed back from the kerb edge
- Keep a suitable area for rubbish bin collection.

Plant heights

High plants can also block sight lines for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists, which can cause safety concerns particularly young children.

Guideline requirement (plant heights)

- Plants grown on nature strips and in street gardens need to be kept under 1m high to ensure visibility for everyone walking, cycling and driving.
- Plants must be kept under 50 cm high in the following circumstances:
 - Plants within 2m from a driveway
 - Plants within 10m from a corner, pedestrian crossing or intersection.

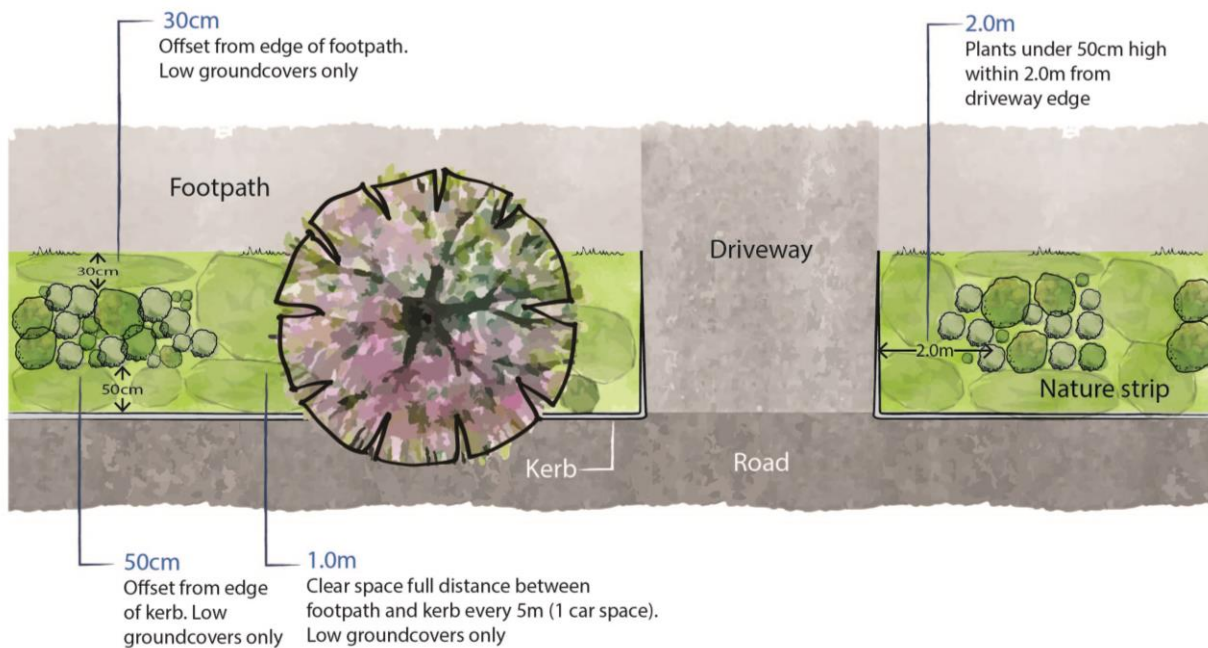


Figure 2 Nature strip gardens next to parallel parking: offsets from footpaths, kerbs and driveways and access between kern and footpath.

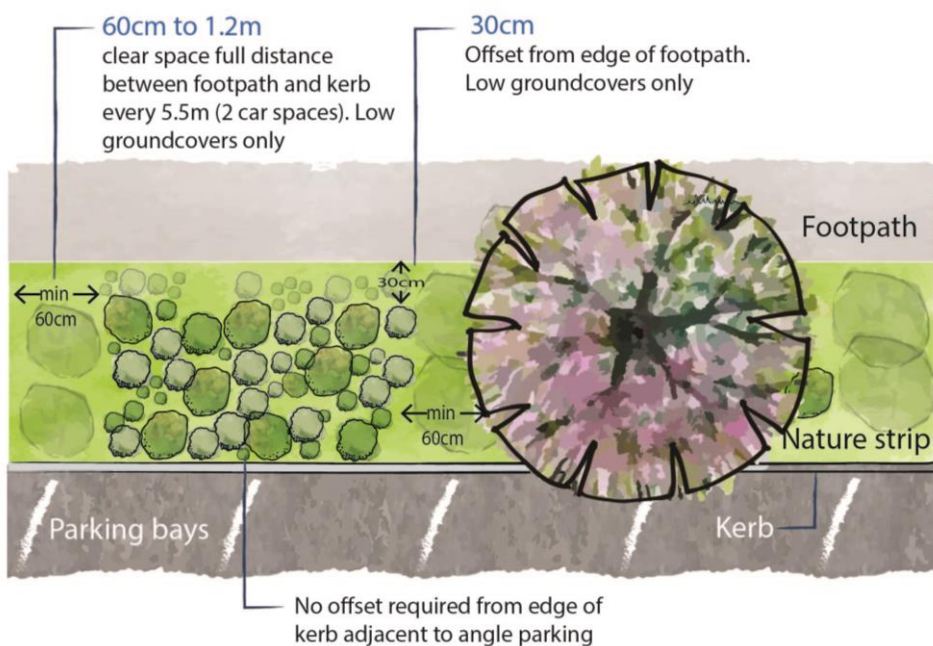


Figure 3 Nature strip gardens next to angle parking: offsets from footpaths, kerbs and access between kern and footpath.

Trees

Street trees provide shade and shelter for people walking and cycling, as well as cooling of streets and surrounding properties in hot weather. Trees contribute to the aesthetics and character of the street and accommodate urban wildlife.

As trees in urban areas are growing in harsher conditions, it is important to protect their growing space. Street trees require an area to be kept free of planting to protect their root zone. This provides trees access to available water and nutrients, allowing roots to breathe and helping protect tree roots from disease.

Newly planted trees need time for roots to establish. Because the soil area in tree plots and some nature strips is limited, allowing the roots of new trees to establish without competing with other plants for water or nutrients will give the tree the best chance to develop into a strong, healthy tree.

Guideline Requirements (planting around trees)

- For trees in nature strips, keep a minimum radius of 50cm or 3 times the trunk diameter (whichever is greater) free of planting surrounding the tree trunk.
- For trees in tree plots keep all planting a minimum radius of 30cm away from the tree trunk and below 50cm in height.
- For newly planted trees, do not plant around the tree for 2 years. Newly planted trees within Port Phillip have a two-year establishment period and have supporting garden stakes installed for this period for identification and support.
- Keep the soil level the same level below the tree canopy, extensive digging or any mounding soil can damage tree roots.
- Do not mound soil, mulch or grass clippings against the tree trunk as this can cause disease.
- Use only hand tools under the tree canopy and take care around tree roots. Do not use mechanical tools.
- If an area is hard to dig, don't force it. A small tree root may be lying under that section of turf.
- If you uncover tree roots, do not cut, scrape or damage them. Any roots that are uncovered during the process can be buried with mulch or new topsoil to keep them healthy
- If possible, use tube stock or the smallest pot size available to limit the amount of digging required under the tree canopy and in tree plots.

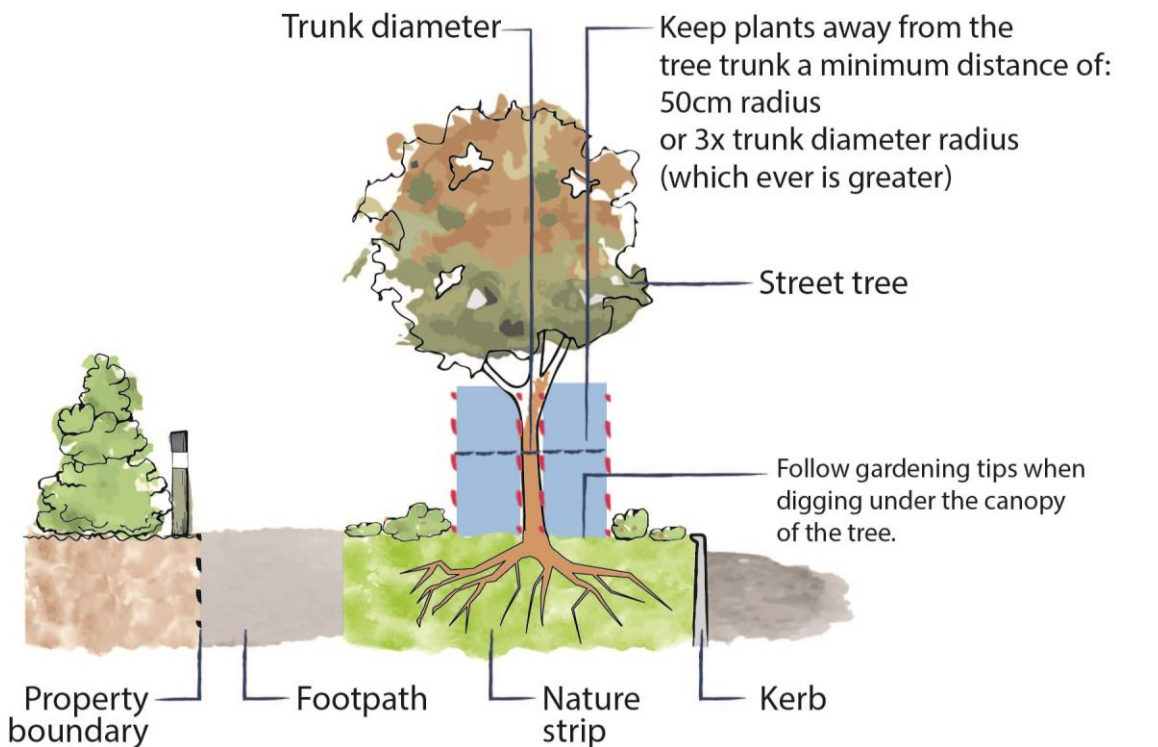


Figure 4 Keep a minimum radius of 50cm or 3 times the trunk diameter (whichever is greater) free of planting surrounding the tree trunk when planting in nature strips

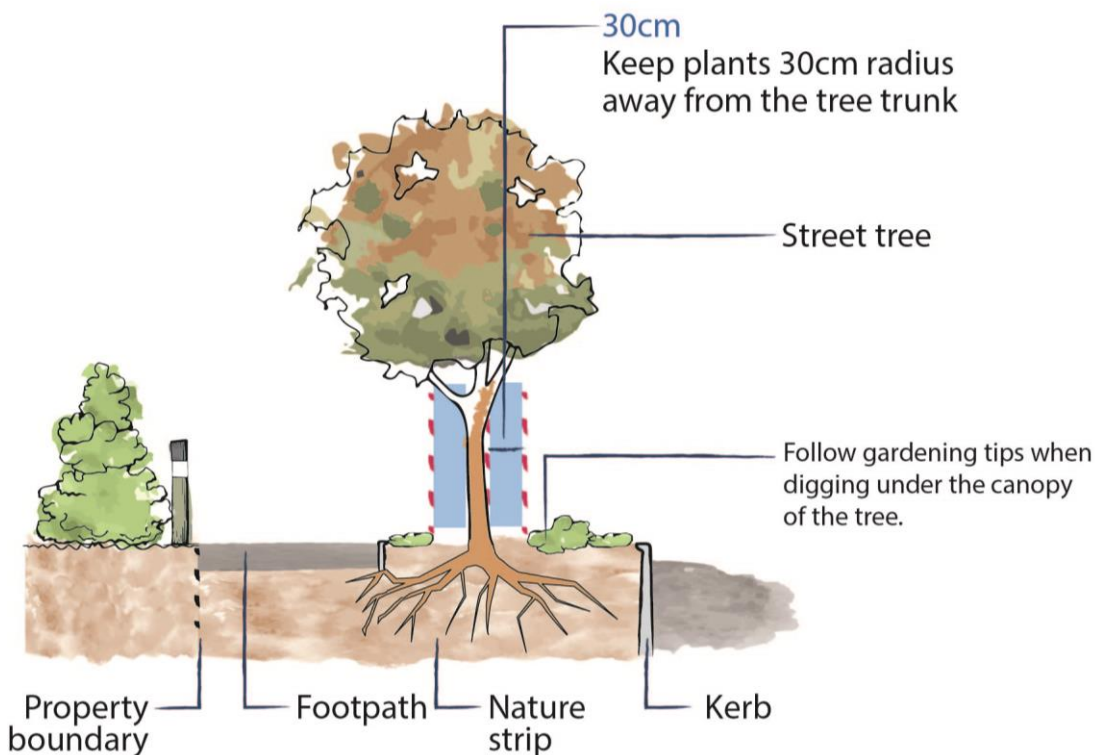


Figure 5 Keep a minimum radius of 30cm free of planting surrounding the tree trunk when planting in tree plots

Natural Gardening

Nature strip gardening can improve the health of the local environment as increased planting can attract insects and fauna to the area and create cool areas in an otherwise hot urban setting. Improving environmental outcomes should be considered when creating your garden.

Guideline Requirements (natural gardening)

- Do not use any materials or plants which could have negative environmental outcomes. This includes but is not limited to weed species, poisonous plants, herbicides, pesticides, synthetic turf or paving.

Recommended plants and common weed species can be found on [Council's website](#).

Rocks and other Infrastructure

Infrastructure included within nature strip gardens could become unsafe and cause accidents. Consider if items could:

- Become slippery or loose
- Block sightlines
- Cause injury if fallen on, as they are sharp or pointed
- Become a trip hazard
- Be misused or create a risk.

Guideline Requirements (infrastructure)

- Do not include anything other than plants and mulch in your garden
- Materials or structures which are not permitted include (but are not limited to) raised edging, paving, irrigation, garden stakes, fencing, walls, furniture, play equipment, art, signs, rocks, letter boxes, community libraries or prickly plants.

Contact council if you are unsure if an item can be included in your nature strip garden.

Planter boxes

Planter boxes are an option to improve greening in areas with no nature strips. The size and placement of the planter boxes need to be considered to maintain access for pedestrians, car doors and bin collection.

Guideline Requirements

- Planter boxes must maintain:
 - 1m clearance from the edge of the kerb
 - 1.5m clear footpath area
 - 1m away from tree trunks, street furniture or structures.
- Planter boxes must be between 0.3m - 0.9m in height and no longer than 1.8m

- Planter boxes must include a sealed base on paved surface and a geotextile fabric on grass/soil.

Essential services

Nature Strips often contain essential services such as power and water. Damaging these services while gardening can be dangerous and costly, so please consider this in your planning.

Utility companies or emergency services may access their infrastructure for upgrades or repairs at any time, and therefore require access to be maintained. Utility companies are required to reinstate grass on the nature strip following maintenance work, but are not required to reinstate nature strips that have been modified and landscaped with anything other than grass.

Guideline Requirements (gardening around essential services)

- Contact [Dial Before You Dig](#) before planting or digging
- Report any damage to essential services or emergency services assets to the appropriate authority
- Provide a 1.5m off-set from fire hydrants.
- Provide a minimum of 30cm offset from storm water pits, service pits, service pillars, power poles and any other service access point.
- You can grow grass, a low ground cover or have mulch in the offset area. The service access points must remain clear of vegetation and visible at all times.

If you are unsure, please [contact Council](#) for assistance.

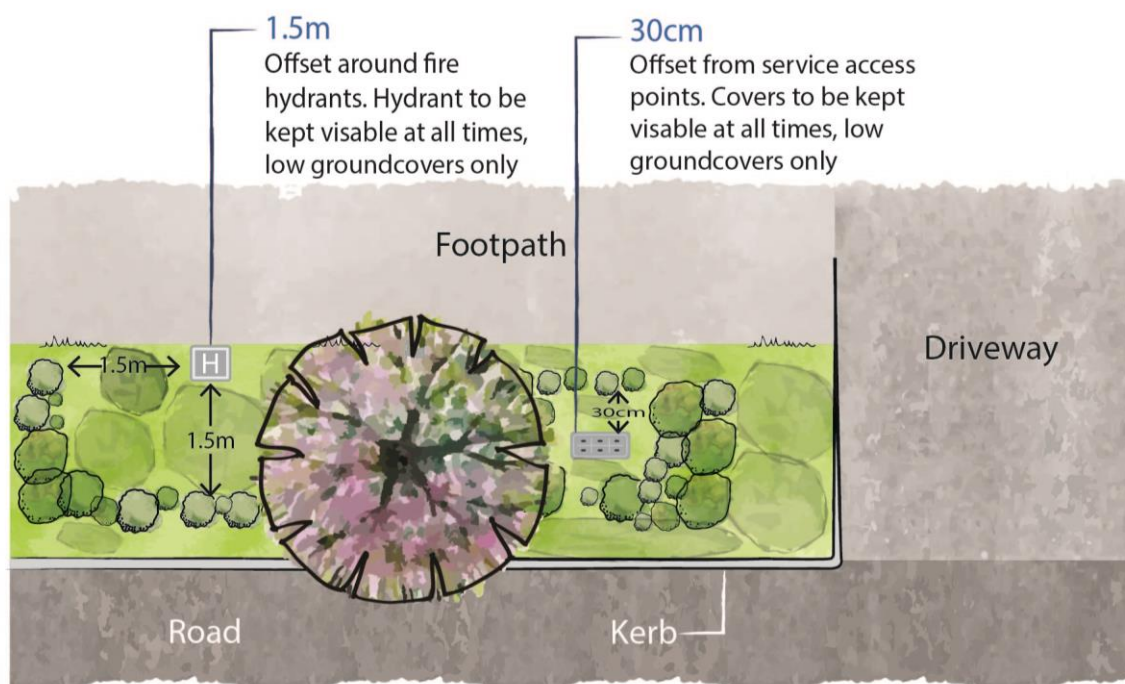


Figure 6 Keep plants 1.5m away from fire hydrants and 0.3m away from service access points



Soil contamination

Soil contamination is common across Port Phillip (and all of inner-Melbourne). Humans may be exposed to these contaminants when gardening, via direct skin contact or by inhaling airborne dust when digging. These contaminants can also transfer to edible plants.

Guideline Recommendation:

- Due to potential health risks, Council recommends that you do not eat plants grown directly in your nature strip or tree plot. You should grow plants you intend to eat in a raised planter box with clean soil purchased from a nursery.

Find out more about [planter boxes](#) or [soil contamination](#).

Contact

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