

## Going native in Doncaster

I live in East Doncaster, an outer eastern suburb of Melbourne, no trains or trams and very infrequent buses, garages, lawns, fences, driveways and dry clay soil. After becoming more aware of the local environment and the horrible effects of introduced, non-native species, I decided that I needed to start removing non-natives and start planting natives on our suburban rental property.

With no gardening experience to aid me, I started to plant a small 2m by 1m garden bed with some Australian Native grasses and bushes I bought from a nursery near Ringwood that were native to the region. I had huge headaches removing the oxalis that infested the bed previously. Within 1 year the native shrubs had all established well and some are now over 1m high. I only watered them occasionally when they were first planted and they've been watered by nothing but the rain for well over a year now. At no point did I use any fertiliser, chemicals or any other gardening aids. All up this cost me \$25 and took 5 hours work.

Following the success of this small bed, I set my sights on an area on the corner of two suburban streets, 8m x 8m square with 5 existing mature eucalyptus trees and 3 small pine trees (the pine trees we later removed with the help of a local council arborist). The soil was very dry and various weeds and vines had to be removed first. I obtained some plants native to Melbourne from CERES in Brunswick East and asked the local council for help. They could not provide me with financial assistance, but they did provide me with many stakes and clear plastic guards! They also gave me the details of a local nursery where I could buy locally native plants! I planted 13 individual plants and let eucalyptus leaf litter build up on the site to improve the soil quality. All up this cost me \$50 and 8 hours work, time and money very well spent and enjoyed!

As I was planting the corner of these two suburban streets, I got many odd and interested looks, a few queries and a few smiles. Once the stakes and guards were in everyone could see that there was some native vegetation regeneration going on here and I imagine it serves as at least a small talking point amongst curious residents as to what environmental-types have taken up residence in their neighbourhood, although I've lived in the area since I was born. My next project will be to plant out the nature strip with plants native to my local area, obtained from the Warrandyte State Park nursery. I plan to remove all non-native trees, plant some young native saplings, build up areas of native grassland and even have plans for a small pond, bird feeders and creating wildlife corridors with our neighbours.

I like to imagine that as this planting expands, it serves as an example to local residents that even in the depths of suburban wasteland, native vegetation regeneration can be done quickly, cheaply, with little experience and be very enjoyable! The plants will be home to native microbes, native insects, native birds and all sorts of other native wildlife. We now have magpies regularly resting in the trees, the odd cockatoo and one night we spotted a Tawny Frog Mouth Owl on our fence! Maybe one day we'll get lizards, marsupials, maybe even koalas and possums, rosellas, flocks of cockatoos or perhaps even frogs!