



Top 10 Indigenous plants

For Melbourne wildlife gardens

'Indigenous' or 'endemic' plants are those which occur naturally in a particular environment. Indigenous Australian plants are those that grew here before major disturbances from introduced farming activities such as land clearing, waterway engineering, and trampling by hard-hoofed animals.

Before European settlement, the Melbourne area was home to five Aboriginal tribes known collectively as the Kulin Nation. Their territory extended across Port Phillip and Western Port bays and throughout central and northern Victoria up to the Great Dividing Range. For more than 50,000 years they lived sustainably off the productive grasslands, bush, swamps, waterways and bays, through organised seasonal hunting, fishing, and foraging, as well as aquacultural and agricultural systems and land management techniques such as fire stick burning to encourage new plant growth.

A combination of introduced plants and animals (many of which became weeds and pests), mass land clearing for farming, mining and building, the introduction of northern hemisphere farming systems unsuited to Australia's fragile soils, and the decimation of Aboriginal communities destroyed productive ecosystems that had been tended and nurtured for tens of thousands of years.

A striking example is Murnong, the yam daisy. Once abundant throughout southeastern Australia, Murnong roots were a nutritious staple for First Nation peoples. They selectively harvested the creamy carrot-shaped tubers once the flowers had died down, and ate them either raw or roasted. Unaware of the immense value of this crop to the locals, early settlers set about ploughing up grasslands for their stock. In only a few decades, the precious Murnong fields were all but gone, taking with them an essential food source. Yam daisies are now rare in the wild.



While we can never recreate those original ecosystems, we can all play a small part by growing plants that once flourished here.

We encourage you to choose indigenous plants because they:

- Are well adapted to local soils, weather and conditions (if planted in more or less the right position and soil type);
- Provide the best food, shelter and refuge for a wide variety of native animals, insects and birds;
- Once established, are mostly very easy to maintain, and need little watering, no fertiliser, and an occasional prune;
- Are relatively free of pests and diseases;
- Provide attractive, useful alternatives to common introduced/exotic plants.

Choosing wildlife-friendly plants from the wide range available can be overwhelming, so we've compiled this list as a useful starting point. [Bili Native Plant Nursery](#) at Port Melbourne recommends these indigenous plants for their hardiness, habitat value, ease of growing, and beauty. All of them can be planted in your garden or in pots if space is limited.

The City of Melbourne's [Urban Nature Planting Guide](#) online is another useful resource for choosing plants for wildlife gardens. As a rough guide, aim for plants that flower, set seed and bear fruit at different times of the year; that grow to a range of heights; and that provide shade, shelter and safe nesting places out of reach of predators. The idea is to constantly have plants in flower around your garden, so that wildlife has reliable, steady food sources all year-round.

GROUNDCOVERS & CLIMBERS

Kidney Weed (*Dichondra repens*)

Prefers shady areas with little traffic



Despite its rather unkind name, Kidney Weed is very pretty. It's a perennial groundcover that forms a dense spreading mat of soft, green, kidney-shaped leaves. Hardy once established, unless constantly trampled. Ideal as lawn substitute (doesn't need mowing) and in rockeries. Needs occasional moisture in summer.

Purple Coral Pea (*Hardenbergia violacea*)

Flowers midwinter to early spring



This pretty climber will either grow across the ground or ramble up into trees or a trellis if available. Large, leathery glossy green evergreen leaves with purple pea-shaped flowers that have a pair of yellow spots. Needs well-drained soils in full sun or light shade. Will tolerate salty wind. A useful groundcover for rockeries. Butterflies love the flowers and smaller birds such as wrens will nest inside dense foliage.

GRASSES, SEDGES, RUSHES, TUSsockS

Tussock Grass (*Poa labillardieri*)

H 30-100cm (depending on conditions)

Flowers spring through late summer



A graceful, weeping native grass often used in landscaping. Long, slender greyish-green or blue-green leaves, with delicate plume-like green/purple seed-heads. Adapts to moist or dry soils, but needs good drainage. Will tolerate full sun but prefers dappled shade.

Small-Flower Flax Lily (*Dianella brevicaulus*)



H 50cm, W 50cm

Flowers late spring through early summer



Perennial rounded tussock with long, strappy, dark green leaves. Tolerates heavy basalt or sedimentary soils, in full sun to part-shade.

Striking clusters of small blue-ish purple and yellow flowers on spikes about the leaves, followed by blue-purplish berries in summer.



Also recommended: Black-anther Flax Lily (*Dianella revoluta*), Spreading Flax Lily (*Dianella admixta*), and native iris (*Patersonia* spp.).

WILDFLOWERS

Yellow Paper Daisy

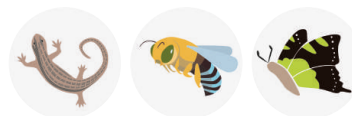
(*Xerochrysum viscosum*) aka Sticky Everlasting, Shiny Everlasting, Golden Everlasting

H 20-80cm, W 30-80cm



Flowers spring–summer (Nov–Jan)

Full sun; tolerates some shade



This pretty wildflower produces papery, long-lasting flowers-heads that range from brilliant lemon to gold, orange and bronze. Long, narrow dark-green leaves with a sticky, rough surface. Prune hard in autumn or winter to maintain bushy growth and extend its somewhat limited life (it's a short-lived perennial that dies down and regenerates from seed each year).

Tolerates most soils, but needs good drainage. Responds to watering in dry conditions. Stunning when planted en masse, and in floral arrangements. Blue-Tongue Lizards love to eat the flowers!

Yam Daisy, Murnong (*Microseris lanceolata*)

H 30-50cm, W 30cm



Flowers July to November

Full sun to part shade



Small perennial rosette of long, narrow, slightly-toothed green leaves with distinctively drooping buds followed by bright yellow flowers that look similar to dandelions.

Prefers well-drained basalt soils. May self-seed but hard to maintain in cultivation. Dies back to tubers in summer and dry spells. As well as having pretty flowers, the edible roots of the yam daisy are highly nutritious, with a nutty taste and potato-like texture.



Austral Stork's Bill (*Pelargonium australe*)



H 10-30cm, W 30-60cm

Flowers spring through summer



Fast-growing, pretty perennial herb with round, velvety and aromatic leaves and clusters of four to 12 pink flowers with purple markings.

May self-seed and spread.

Prefers well-drained soils, and is particularly well-suited for rockeries. A great Indigenous alternative to the introduced geranium.



Native Fuchsia
(*Correa reflexa*)

TREES & SHRUBS

Bushy Needlewood (*Hakea sericea*)

H 1-3m, W 1-3m



Flowers winter and early spring

Prefers full sun, will grow in part shade (grows taller and with a more open habit in shade)



Fast-growing erect or spreading shrub with long, stiff, pointy needle-like leaves and pinky-white flowers. Grows best in well-drained basalt or sedimentary soils.

Smaller birds love its nectar, woody fruit and prickly, protective growth, where they can safely nest. Although it is a great screening bush, plant



Native Fuchsia (*Correa reflexa*, *Correa glabra*)

H 1-2m, W 2-3m (semi-prostrate forms available)



Flowers Mar–Sept (*Correa reflexa* mainly May–Nov but can have some flowers year-round)



Prefers dry shade but will tolerate full sun



Small honeyeaters such as New Holland Honeyeaters and Eastern Spinebills love Correa's dense leaves and tubular flowers; either light green or white bells (*glabra*) or reddish with yellow tips (*reflexa*). The flowers also attract bees and butterflies. These plants are happy in most soils and positions, but prefer well-drained soils. They're free from garden pests and diseases, and make beautiful evergreen screens and hedges if pruned. We recommend buying Correas when they're in flower, so you choose your preferred colour and form.



Native Fuchsia
(*Correa glabra*)

Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*)

H 1-2m, W 1-3m



Flowers year-round



A rounded, fast-growing and adaptable shrub with bright green oval leaves and asymmetrical yellow flowers, mainly in spring. Prefers a sheltered position and moist, well-drained soils, but will tolerate dry conditions as well as waterlogging.

It grows well underneath trees. Hop Goodenia tolerates a fairly wide range of conditions, but may be short-lived and will benefit from pruning.



Plant descriptions for this fact sheet adapted with permission from the Bili Plant Nursery website, and the following references:

- *Cronin's Key Guide to Australian Wildflowers* (© 2008 Cronin, L., Jacana Books)
- *Plants of Melbourne's Western Plains* (© 2011 Australian Plant Society Keilor Plains Group Inc.)
- *Wildflowers of the Wilderness Coast* (© 2017 Greig, J. Mallacoota, Victoria, Australia 3892)
- *Australian Native Grasses—Key species and their uses* (© 2015 Native Seeds Pty Ltd), Raulings, K.A. And Chivers, I.H. Fourth revised edition
- [Australian National Botanic Gardens online](#)

Gardens for Wildlife—City of Melbourne

Gardens for Wildlife Melbourne is a community-based gardening program that aims to foster social connections and biodiversity goals.

The program recognises the conservation contribution and the meaningful role of individuals and their gardens.

[Gardens for Wildlife Victoria](#) is a state-wide network of community group and local government partnerships active in more than 25 municipalities across Victoria.



Further reading:

- *A Wildlife Garden: An introduction to attracting wildlife to urban Melbourne gardens* (© 2019 D Wolfe) [Download PDF](#), [download Word document](#)
- *The Little Things That Run The City* (© 2017 City of Melbourne, by Kate Cranney, Sarah Bekessy and Luis Mata), available free as PDF and Word download or for purchase at Melbourne Museum Shop and the Royal Botanic Gardens Shop for RRP \$30
- *Melbourne's Wildlife—A Field Guide to the Fauna of Greater Melbourne* (Museum Victoria & CSIRO Publishing)
- *Habitat—A practical guide to creating a wildlife-friendly Australian garden* (© 2018 AB Bishop)
- *Creating Your Eco-Friendly Garden* (© 2008 Mary Horsfall, CSIRO Publishing)

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