A Wildlife Garden

An introduction to attracting wildlife to urban Melbourne gardens

Blue-banded bee (*Amegilla cingulata*)

Creating a backyard, balcony, or small area of habitat for wildlife is a great way for people who live in the city to connect with nature and protect urban biodiversity. Start small, seek advice from your local council and groups, visit your nearest native plant nursery, and introduce habitat plants slowly but surely. It may take some time, but you'll be rewarded with fascinating and beautiful visitors that will bring you and your family great joy as they feed, bathe, drink, nest, and make themselves at home in your backyard.

SHELTER

Safe from predators, suitable for nesting/ breeding, no pesticides

WATER

Close access to fresh water in suitable container

FOOD

Nectar, seeds, flowers, fruit, leaves, insects/protein

PRIVACY

No day-to-day disturbances or intrusion while feeding etc.

PATIENCE

Willingness to wait and see what turns up in your garden!

Melbourne's unique wildlife

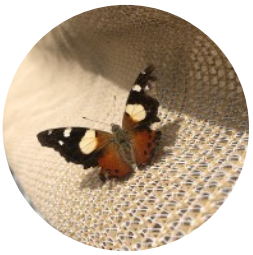
Our local fauna is incredibly diverse and beautiful, and worth protecting in cities as well as the bush.

Unfortunately we've destroyed and polluted most of their natural habitats and introduced predators such as cats and dogs.

However, we can help wildlife to survive and flourish in our own backyards by creating safe micro-habitats.

If you're just starting out creating a wildlife-friendly garden, your most common visitors at first will probably be insects. This is a good thing—insects create a base food source for birds, lizards, frogs and other wildlife.

Resist the temptation to kill bugs you might think are pests—such as aphids and spiders. They each have their place in the environment as either predators/prey for other insects, birds, lizards, bats and frogs. For example, hoverflies and ladybird larvae are voracious eaters of aphids.



Yellow Admiral (*Vanessa itea*)

Cockroaches are much-maligned, but the native ones play a vital role in gardens, breaking down decaying plant matter into nutrient-rich humus that in turn feeds the soil.

Tachinid fly (*Rutilia sp.*)

Earthworms, too, contribute to a healthy ecosystem by breaking down green waste and kitchen scraps into compost to feed the soil.

Native cockroach (*Drymaplaneta sp.*)

Dainty swallowtail caterpillar (*Papilio anactus*)

Aim to spend a few quiet minutes in your garden every day. If it's sunny and springtime, you might see butterflies such as the Yellow Admiral.

The brilliant green bodies of Tachinid flies flash in the sunlight as they fly about laying their eggs, and you might hear the distinctive high-pitched buzz of a Blue-banded bee as it 'buzz pollinates' the flowers.

Blue-banded bee (*Amegilla sp.*)

Hoverfly (*Melangyna viridiceps*) & Spotted ladybird (*Harmonia conformis*)

Wildlife-friendly gardens can attract:

Insects (butterflies, bees, dragonflies)

Birds (honey-eaters, wattle birds, magpies, parrots, rosellas, finches)

Amphibians (frogs)

Reptiles (lizards, geckos)

Marsupials & mammals (possums, bats)

Recommended reading:

- *Melbourne's Wildlife—A Field Guide to the Fauna of Greater Melbourne (Museum Victoria & CSIRO Publishing)*
- *Creating Your Eco-Friendly Garden (© 2008 Mary Horsfall, CSIRO Publishing)*
- *Attracting Frogs to Your Garden (© 1996 Kevin Casey, Kimberley Publications)*

Mantids are fascinating to watch as they stalk their insect prey, swaying gently from side to side, mimicking the movement of a stalk of grass.

Birds such as honey-eaters and wattle birds are frequent visitors to gardens with native nectar-producing, flowering plants like Grevillea, Hakea, Callistemon and Correa.

Sometimes you'll see weird and wonderful critters like the Phasmid (stick insect), a Bagworm Moth case hanging from a branch, or the cartoonish Cowboy Beetle.

In the evenings, possums and bats come out of their nests/roosts to forage for food. If you're lucky you might glimpse a marbled gecko behind an old wooden fence paling, lying in wait for a tasty mosquito, or a mother possum with her baby clinging to her back.

There's a whole world out there to discover!

Earthworm (*Oligochaeta spp.*)
Photo: Lydia Best, NatureShare

Spotted ladybird larvae
(*Harmonia conformis*)

Marbled gecko
(*Christinus marmoratus*)
Photo by Wendy,
NatureShare

Brown mantid (*Archimantis latistyla*)

Spur-legged Stick Insect
(*Didymuria violescens*)

Bagworm Moth case
(*Metura elongates*)

New Holland Honeyeater
(*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*)
Photo: Nalini Scarfe

Cowboy Beetle
(*Chondropyga dorsalis*)

Key ingredients to welcoming wildlife into your garden…

SHELTER

Like us, insect and other animal species need suitable places to shelter, nest, roost, sleep and raise their families. From insect and bee hotels to nesting boxes, and from dense/prickly shrubs and trees to ponds and pools, wildlife-friendly shelter needs to be out of reach of predators such as dogs, cats, rats, and foxes (an increasing problem in inner urban Melbourne). Be creative and make your own insect hotels from old vases, pots, aromatherapy burners, sticks, and gardening materials.

FOOD / PLANTS

Visit your local library, native plant nursery, council, and gardening group to help choose the best plants for your garden that also provide food for wildlife via their leaves, flowers, seeds and fruit. Avoid weeds and invasive plants, and plant a range of indigenous species that are well-adapted to local conditions as well as being attractive to wildlife.

Wildlife food plant groups to consider

- Wildflowers
- Groundcovers and climbers
- Trees and shrubs
- Grasses
- Culinary / multi-purpose plants

Aim for plants that flower, set seed and bear fruit at different times of the year as well as provide shade, shelter and nesting places. The idea is to always have some plants in flower, even in winter.

Leave some plants to run to seed; herbs like parsley, native plants such as Long-leaf wax flower, and indigenous grasses create little 'nurseries' for ladybirds, bees, and hover flies. Right throughout the year you can see eggs, larvae and adult insects dotted throughout these plants.

Long-leaf wax flower or native daphne (*Philotheca myoporoides*)

Parsley (Petroselinum crispum) in flower

Correa (*Correa spp.*)

Kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*)

Bangalow palm (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*)

Grevillea spp.

Culinary plants

Native plants that provide food for both wildlife and you, and that grow well in Melbourne, include:

Warrigal greens, Munyeroo (native portulaca or purslane), Nardoo, Murnong (native dandelion or yam daisy; *Microseris spp.*), native oregano (Round-leaf mint bush; *Prostanthera rotundifolia*), and Vanilla lily (*Arthropodium milleflorum)*, which has an edible root similar to water chestnut.

Once a major food source for First Nations peoples, yam daisy was widespread throughout southern Australia. Heavy grazing and trampling by hard-hoofed introduced animals such as sheep and cattle quickly decimated the Murnong fields almost to the point of extinction. As well as having pretty, dandelion-like flowers, the edible roots of the yam daisy are highly nutritious, with a nutty taste and potato-like texture.

Murnong or Yam daisy (*Microseris sp.*)

Munyeroo (native portulaca or purslane) (*Portulaca oleracea*)

Warrigal greens (*Tetragonia tetragonioides*)

WATER

Provide year-round access to water in your garden, in a range of wildlife-friendly vessels. Think beyond bird baths: bees in particular need easy access to water near the flowers from which they're gathering nectar, so they can continue to pollinate without having to leave the area. However, smaller insects can drown in bird baths, so fill old pottery bowls with gravel, pebbles and small stones to give them something to perch on while they're drinking. In summer, other wildlife like possums need safe access to drinking water out of the reach of dogs and cats.

PRIVACY & PATIENCE

Many of our native animals are nocturnal and/or very shy, so it takes time and patience to build environments where they feel safe enough to venture and set up their home. Even when they do come into your backyard, you may not see them often, or at all.

Take some time to sit in your garden (or courtyard or on the balcony) at different times of the day and evening, and quietly observe the comings and goings. Your patience will be rewarded in time, with visits from all sorts of captivating creatures, big and small.

Ringtail possums (*Pseudocheirus peregrinus*)
Photo: Victorian Government

Green Grass Dart (*Ocybadistes walkeri*)

If we're to live gently alongside our wildlife, we need to avoid pesticides and herbicides, minimise interference with our environments, and embrace a messier-looking landscape than we're probably used to. We must start seeing our flora and fauna as intrinsically inter-connected with our lives, as well valuable and beautiful in their own right.

Eastern Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*)

Native hibiscus (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*)

Nardoo (*Marsilea drummondii*)

Pigface (*Carpobrotus spp.*)

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Garden/fauna photos taken by Diana in her inner urban Melbourne garden, except where indicated. Selected indigenous plant photos taken at Bili Nursery (Westgate Biodiversity), Port Melbourne, June 2019.

Useful links

- City of Melbourne Sustainable Gardening
- City of Melbourne Urban Nature Planting Guide
- City of Melbourne Urban Biodiversity
- https://westgatebiodiversity.org.au/
- City of Yarra Removing Weeds in Yarra and Planting Indigenous Alternatives
- City of Moreland Gardening with Indigenous Plants in Moreland
- gardensforwildlifevictoria.com/
- https://vicflora.rbg.vic.gov.au/flora
- wildlifevictoria.org.au/wildlife-information/wildlife-fact-sheets
- wildmelbourne.org/
- agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/weeds/a-z-of-weeds
- Australian Native Plants Society
- The Australian Museum (wildlife information and identification)
- Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria (plant identification)
- Sustainable Gardening Australia
- floraforfauna.com.au
- iNaturalist https://www.inaturalist.org/

Gardens for Wildlife—City of Melbourne

Gardens for Wildlife Melbourne is a new 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.
melbourne.vic.gov.au/community/greening-the-city/urban-nature/Pages/gardens-for-wildlife