

Waterwise Council Case Study



Walkington Ave Community Verge Garden Demonstration Project

Synopsis

Walking ton Ave. Community Verge Garden Demonstration Project Community Urban Streetscape Project (or CUSP) – on the verge of sustainability Great benefits can be achieved from developing landscapes with low-water, or in some instances zero-water requirements by retrofitting residential verge areas. It is vital however that council determined specifications are understood and adhered to regarding approval, pedestrian access, plant selection and set-back specifications.

A demonstration of how to implement this has been achieved by residents of Walkington Ave. in the township of Margaret River. Residents have replaced a sprawling lawn area with deeply mulched gardens planted with local endemic native species.



Motivation

Prior to the commencement of the street project, residents from Walkington Ave. had approached the Shire with a proposal for a project titled, 'Community Urban Streetscape Project (or CUSP) – on the *verge* of sustainability. The project aimed to serve as a demonstration for the Shire in order to encourage the adoption of similar streetscapes throughout the Margaret River area.

Encouraging the community to adopt low water use native verge gardens was identified as a high priority for the Water Corporation's Water Efficiency Branch during 2010.

The Shire of Augusta Margaret River was approached by the Water Corporation with the concept of developing a demonstration verge garden within the community in the Margaret River town area. The community's successful proposal was presented to the Water Corporation as one of several project options.

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The CUSP group was then approached and subsequently indicated that they would be very enthusiastic to go forward with the proposal to develop the 'Walkington Ave. Community Demonstration Verge Garden Project'.

Process/Approach

Eight residents participated in the verge garden retrofit project. Each garden was treated for weeds using round-up several weeks prior to the commencement of the project. The sites were then prepared with the use of a backhoe, bobcat and rotary hoe to ensure that the soil was correctly prepared for planting. Soil near the curbing was scraped back to allow for the mulch to be caught in the gutter on the side adjacent to the road to prevent mulch from spilling onto the road.

Local endemic species were selected for the project, which require little or no water following the establishment period. The area was mulched with coarse waterwise mulch in order to shade the soil, reduce evaporation and to suppress the growth of weeds.

One of the residents elected to install sub-surface irrigation to ensure that their plants were able to be watered automatically once per week over the establishment period. All other residents chose to water by hand on a weekly basis for the first summer only to ensure that their plants would survive their first dry season. The residents all intend on ceasing summer watering following this establishment period.

The second stage of the project was conducted in June 2011. Three additional gardens were installed along with follow-up planting to replace plants that did not survive the first dry summer period in the first stage of the project.

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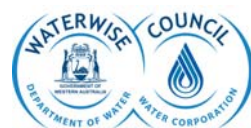


Before - Prior to project commencement, 16 and 18 Walkington Ave.



Following Establishment August 2010- Planted out verge, 16 and 18 Walkington Ave.

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Following spraying to kill off grass, 8 Walkington Ave



Planted out verge August 2010, 8 Walkington Ave

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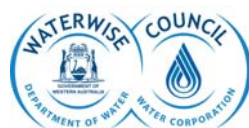


Before - Prior to project commencement, 20 Georgette Drive



Planting out the Verge August 2010, 20 Georgette Drive

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Benefits

The benefits of the project are numerous, not least the improved aesthetic street appeal which also has the potential to increase the value of property. Plants will not require watering beyond the first or second summer, which will eventually result in a zero water landscape area.

Savings will be made from the reduction of the need to irrigate vast areas of lawn in the order of up to approximately 100 square metres in area per household. Native tubestock seedlings were planted with a density of approximately 1.5 plants/m² on each site. Plants were carefully selected to ensure that they would grow to no more than 75cm at maturity. This ensures that issues relating to visibility or line of site from the road and any interference with powerlines is avoided.

Although most of the residents have chosen not to water their lawn verges in past years, the potential savings from the reduction in the need to water equivalent irrigated areas of lawn could potentially save up to 435kL each year across the eight properties, or approximately \$65 per year per household in water consumption costs.



Alison Mckenzie and daughter planting out their garden, 8 Walkington Ave

Costs

The highly successful 'Walkington Ave Community Verge Garden Demonstration Project' was funded by the Water Corporation and was a joint initiative with the Shire of Augusta Margaret River.

The Shire of Augusta Margaret River provided technical support and assistance for the project and the Water Corporation provided funding for the installation and retrofit of the eight Native Demonstration Verge Gardens in Walkington Ave

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Lessons Learnt

It was important to submit an application to the Shire to install the gardens prior to commencement, to ensure that plans meet all council determined specifications such as plant height and set back requirements.

It's ok to leave dead grass in situ after it has been sprayed off providing all persistent weeds such as onion weed have been killed off effectively prior to planting. Mulching the site deeply will help to reduce any weed burden in the future.

Verge edges were scraped back mechanically using a digger to provide a natural drop for the mulch to sit in along the road edge to reduce the amount of spill-over into storm-drains.

Planting earlier would have been more beneficial for plant survival over the summer, however time constraints meant that planting in the first stage of the project happened later in the season than would have been ideal. Subsequently, some hand watering over the dry period and replanting was necessary in the following autumn.

Further Information/References

Nature Verge (Brochure) - Shire of Busselton

http://www.busselton.wa.gov.au/files/Nature%20Verge%20Booklet_final.pdf

Contact Details

Lucy Nankervis Water Efficiency Project Officer Water Corporation South West Region
T: (08) 9791 0497 | M: 0427 080 529 lucy.nankervis@watercorporation.com.au

ISBN 1 74043 670 9 November 2010

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