

# Biodiversity in the

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*"The threats to endangered species and the loss of habitats start in places close to human developments."*

Society for Growing Australian Plants

## Urban riches

Some of Australia's most biodiverse areas survive around urban centres. For example, there is rich biodiversity in the sandstone country and smooth barked apple (*Angophora*) forests north of Sydney, and in the rainforests of the Border Ranges near Brisbane.

It wasn't long ago that many councils saw urban bushland as a waste of good land. But as city dwellers see their communities become more built up, the urban equivalent of

Landcare has sprung up in the suburbs. One hundred bush regeneration groups now work in Sydney, with 12 in Brisbane and similar numbers in Canberra and Melbourne.

In Perth, volunteers at the Kings Park and Botanic Gardens have restored bushland nearby. Researchers at the Gardens have also provided information which has helped to restore native vegetation in the Mt Eliza escarpment and in the Jarrah and Tuart forests.

There are several major threats to urban biodiversity. Land clearing of course has a substantial impact. So too do nutrients. Australian plant life has adapted to our continent's ancient, low-nutrient soils. When urban bushland is invaded by detergents, sewage overflows and stormwater, these chemicals act as a fertiliser, encouraging weeds to run rampant and suffocate native plants.

## Make your garden a biodiversity haven

- Redesign your backyard to welcome back the birds, butterflies, possums and lizards. Plant local natives to attract birds and grow native ground covers such as prostrate *Grevillea* instead of lawn. Native gardens also need less watering, pesticides and fertilisers. Let your nature strip grow, and see the local wildflowers appear!
- Provide a refuge from cats and dogs for lizards and small marsupials by placing terracotta pipes around the



# backyard and beyond

- Create nesting sites for native birds. A useful guide is *The Nestbox Book*, published by the Gould League.
- “Don’t squash me ‘till you’ve read this!” Many insect predators such as lady beetles, wasps, mantises and spiders lurk in our gardens. Encourage these by avoiding or limiting use of pesticides.
- Make your own environmentally sound bushrock. Rocks in the bush are important habitats for hundreds of species, particularly lizards and should be left alone. Make your own by painting a clean piece of stone with milk – leave outside and within a few weeks moss starts to grow! Small stones piled in a heap also makes an ideal habitat for lizards and insects.

## If you don’t have a garden

- Join a bush regeneration group through the local council or National Trust. Councils need and appreciate this volunteer help and it’s a creative and stimulating way to meet like-minded people.
- Ask your children’s school to have an urban bush education day where they can discover biodiversity.
- Challenge proposed developments which would destroy urban bush or open spaces.
- If you live in a town or city, ensure the firewood you buy is not collected from threatened hardwood

## People making a difference

A co-operative run by Aboriginal people in the Richmond Valley, northern NSW, is harnessing the local community’s backyards to help save a spectacular rare butterfly. The Bulunyah nursery is propagating rainforest vines, which the birdwing butterfly relies on for feeding its larvae. Many of these vines were eradicated when large areas of the butterfly’s rainforest habitat were cleared early this century, endangering its survival. Once mature, the vines will be distributed to local schools and home gardens where they can be re-established for the butterflies to feed on.

**Association of Societies for Growing Australian Plants**

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forests such as yellowbox or mallee.

- Use pine plantation residues, or even better, switch to gas heating. One of the biggest threats to rural bird populations is removal of dead trees for firewood, because old trees provide nesting hollows

