

A greener, cooler, more liveable city

We are working to reduce the impacts of heat, protect and enhance biodiversity and help more people enjoy public spaces.

Why it matters

Urban heat is an increasing threat to liveability and productivity because cities have less vegetation cover than surrounding land. Instead, they're full of concrete, brick and asphalt – hard and dark materials that absorb heat, which worsen summer heat extremes and jeopardise the health and wellbeing of people, pets and native wildlife. In addition, temperatures are intensified by climate change, with more frequent and extreme hot weather and heatwaves.

Increased densification and larger houses have resulted in the loss of large canopy trees across Port Phillip. However, trees and greenery benefit individual households and the whole municipality. For example, the shade from trees can provide highly localised cooling, reducing pavement surface temperatures by over 10 degrees compared to non-shaded footpaths and providing a more comfortable environment for walking. Across a precinct, planting trees can reduce air temperatures by up to 2 degrees, helping to minimise heat-related illness and death and giving people better access to cooler green spaces.

The shade from trees helps to cool homes and reduce electricity bills. They add beauty and value to properties and bring nature into backyards. Plants of all sizes provide critical shelter and food for wildlife, from tiny insects to birds and reptiles. In addition, green spaces can lower stress levels, reduce rates of anxiety and depression and improve wellbeing.

[Breakout box] Urban Forest

An urban forest is the sum of all trees and vegetation growing within a metropolitan area. We take a unified approach to managing and planning for public and private trees and vegetation by considering all our greenery as an urban forest. In Port Phillip, our urban forest includes:

- front and backyard gardens
- balcony gardens
- rooftop gardens and green roofs
- vertical gardens – vegetation growing up the walls of buildings and fences
- street trees, shrubs and groundcovers on nature strips, median strips and roundabouts

- trees and gardens in public parks, reserves and beaches
- Trees along transport routes
- trees and gardens in other open spaces, such as shopping strips and industrial properties.

Growing our urban forest provides balance to our highly urbanised environment, improves the daily lives of residents and visitors' experience, and sustains our city's long-term liveability.

How we're going

- We planted 41,337 plants through the Urban Forest Strategy in 2021/22,
- We adopted the Places for People: Public Space Strategy 2022-32, which sets the vision and blueprint for the future of our public spaces in the City of Port Phillip
- We updated our Nature Strip Guidelines and are improving our Community Gardening Program to increase greening in public areas.
- We trialled our first woody meadow, a cost-effective and water-efficient way to manage complex open space plantings.
- We invested in species diversification, park trees and streetscape improvements and prioritised biodiversity by planting indigenous and climate-tolerant species.
- We completed our biodiversity study and have developed a set of actions for the Urban Forest Strategy and other strategies and projects.
- We drafted an update to the local law to increase the protection of large canopy trees.
- We investigated how we can further protect vegetation on private property through planning scheme controls.
- We completed the [Cooling South Melbourne](#) report on what Council can do to create a cooler South Melbourne by using different materials, more greening and even water misting.
- We're beginning work on a new Urban Forest Strategy to set our future actions and ensure we're fulfilling community expectations around greening.

[Breakout box] Canopy cover

We set targets to increase canopy cover on streets and private land by 10 per cent. Increasing canopy cover has become even more critical in recent years, given the extra demand for green space following COVID-19 lockdowns due to more sports participation and more people working from home. Unfortunately, this data has proven difficult to obtain for other parties, so we have committed to undertaking canopy coverage mapping as part of our new Urban Forest Strategy. We are also committed to identifying the best way to ensure we comply with requirements to keep tree branches away from electrical lines while preventing a large reduction in tree canopy.

Key partners

- The Community
- Victorian Government

- Port Phillip EcoCentre
- Local environmental groups
- Business community
- Neighbouring councils.

Targets

The Urban Forest Strategy is under review and will establish new targets and indicators.

Council indicator	Baseline 2015/16	Target 2028	Contributing Projects (see initiatives table below)
Percentage of street canopy cover	19%	10% increase on baseline (20.9%) Revised targets to be developed through Council's new Urban Forest Strategy.	10 Urban Forest Strategy 11-Supporting Guidelines and Plans 13-Heat Mapping
Community indicator	Baseline 2015/16	Target 2028	
Percentage of private land canopy cover	11%	10% increase on baseline (12.1%)	10 Urban Forest Strategy 12-Biodiversity study 13-Heat Mapping 14- Vegetation and canopy cover on private property

Initiatives

	Initiative	What's involved
10	Urban Forest Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and deliver a new Urban Forest Strategy to include additional actions identified in the public space strategy and other core strategies.
11	Supporting guidelines and plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement guidelines and plans supporting the implementation of the Urban Forest Strategy, including a new Foreshore and Hinterland Vegetation Management Plan, a street tree planting program, and a land acquisition policy to increase public space within the municipality.
12	Biodiversity study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate biodiversity study findings into the Urban Forest Strategy and implement initiatives to support biodiversity in the municipality.
13	Heat mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Victorian Government heat mapping data and demographic information to inform project and service delivery, including the design of public spaces, asset management, community and staff safety, and drinking water fountains around the municipality.
14	Vegetation and canopy cover on private property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver technical guidance and implement regulatory interventions to protect vegetation and increase canopy cover on private property, including green roofs, walls and facades.