

Plant & maintain Native Vegetation Insectary (NVI)



Plant orders

It is important to order plants at least five months in advance. Ordering in November is ideal, as plants will grow to order and be ready for planting from May to July. Tube stock is best because it is easy to plant with a Hamilton tree planter and puts on new growth quickly.

Site preparation

Sites that have had regular weed control may not need much more preparation before autumn/winter planting. However, be aware that weed management will be necessary for at least two years after planting. This can be tricky as you need to avoid spraying the native species. Weed wands, slashing, and manual weeding may be required.

Another option is to include a layer of jute weed mat before planting. This limits weed seed germination and reduces the frequency of weed control needed as the native plants establish.

Plant during autumn or winter when rainfall can keep the plants watered. This allows them to establish and take advantage of rapid growth in the spring once the weather warms up.



Image: NVI planted outside a dam embankment, Werribee South.

Planting



1. Plant shrubs at least 1 metre apart, and groundcovers can be planted closer together to speed up ground coverage. This site was planted without jute, resulting in competition from weeds.
2. Peg down the jute and double layer it if you think weeds will grow through easily.
3. A layer of mulch on top of the jute and plants can also be applied as another weed barrier, ensuring you don't smother young plants.

If there is good soil moisture, a light watering should be sufficient. If rain is forecast, watering may not be necessary after planting, and once established, no additional watering is required. Native plants are climatically adapted. We can even select species suitable for wetter areas if necessary.

4. An example insectary is at E.E. Muirs in Werribee South. Plants have been tagged and are available for growers to observe size, shape, and flowering.

If you have the time, it is always helpful to put in plant tags so that contractors can recognise native plants when performing weed control.

Fact Sheet 3
Plant and maintain a NVI.

Maintaining

Over the first two years, you will need to continue weed control, whether through slashing, hand weeding, or selective spraying with a weed wand to reduce competition with native species. Applying herbicide through a spray rig is faster but less targeted.

Broadleaf sprays will kill native species, so we have conducted small on-farm trials to explore options to reduce this need. Once groundcovers are well established, weeds should only require occasional management.

Some weeds, such as mallows and capeweed, actually serve as host plants for pest insects such as the Red-legged earth-mite and Harlequin bug.



Environmental benefits from NVI

Planting native vegetation on a vegetable farm can help growers meet sustainability credentials outlined in the industry's Horticulture Sustainability Framework.

NVIs implement sustainable agricultural practices that promote natural solutions to issues like weeds and pests. This approach can reduce the time and costs associated with managing these challenges by leveraging plant competition. Additionally, native vegetation serves as a nectar source for beneficial insects and provides habitat for insectivorous birds.

Native groundcovers protect bare soil on areas that require regular weed management, such as embankments. These areas are often maintained with herbicide, leaving soils exposed and causing erosion of topsoil into drainage lines and nearby rivers and creeks.



Image (Left) Embankment with half covered with pigface and half left bare (current practice). Rill erosion drains into the waterway. (Right) Same embankment showing a close-up of the pigface. Minimal weed competition, soil covered, and no erosion.

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For more information about this project or our other activities please contact Karen Thomas on karen.thomas@melbournewater.com.au or visit

<https://www.melbournewater.com.au/farm-biodiversity>



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