



the place
to live

BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP HANDBOOK

Welcome! We are thrilled that you are interested in encouraging children to play and explore the outdoors in local parks and bushland reserves. Outdoor play has countless benefits for young minds and we are committed to support you.

BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

Darebin City Council is committed to facilitating safe and joyous nature learning experiences and has prepared this handbook to help early childhood educators create a successful outdoor program.

Why take the classroom outdoors?

Nature play has been shown to improve physical and mental health, social ability, self-esteem and resilience in young people. Nature play also allows children to become more empathetic towards the natural world. It is an opportunity to teach them how to care for animals and plants while nurturing their curiosity and love for the outdoors.

Learning outdoors in the Early Years Framework

The Department of Education and Training (DET) encourage the use of natural areas for learning and education.

The key learning outcomes relating to outdoor

education include;

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity.

Children develop a confident self-identity when they explore and engage in new social and physical environments.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

Through firsthand experience, children develop an awareness of their impact on the local environment and are able to become involved in caring for nature.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.

Regular contact with nature relieves children's minds and ignites curiosity. Outdoor environments allow children to expand and refine their abilities both mentally and physically.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners.

Ever changing outdoor environments invite hypothesising, imagination, interaction, problem solving and experimentation.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

Children can share stories, use natural materials to create art and interact with each other and their surroundings.

Nature Play

Throughout the City of Darebin, there are many outdoor spaces where you can experience "nature play". If you've had fun outside, observed and listened to birds calling, climbed on logs, played in the dirt, dug in sand, scrambled up rocks, ran through fallen leaves or rolled down hills, then you have already experienced nature play.

The City of Darebin encourages children to be hands-on in parks, exploring with all of their senses. However, it is important that visits do not negatively impact the natural and cultural values within parks and bushland reserves.



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

BUSH KINDER PRINCIPLES

Please follow the bush kinder principles when visiting parks and bushland.

- Take only memories, leave only footprints. Use photos, drawings or a nature journal to take your memories home rather than collecting a souvenir.
- Remember that public open space is for everyone and may need to be shared. Respect that the park is there for everyone to enjoy!
- Please ensure that you pack up your site and take your belongings with you.
- Take all of your food scraps home to recycle or place in the bin.
- Please remember that there is no storage available in any public site.
- Teach children the importance of caring for natural spaces and why it is important to leave spaces in the same way they are found.
- Respect the vegetation and avoid trampling and pulling out plants. Our landscapes are often revegetated through the hard work of volunteers, please respect their efforts and avoid playing in areas where new plants are establishing.
- Animals are healthiest eating their natural food, please do not share your food with them.
- Don't break or snap branches to make shelters, this may cause plants to become sick from disease.
- Never walk up to wildlife as they may become threatened, scared and defensive. Always observe from a safe distance.
- Finding and categorising natural objects based on size, shape, colour and texture is a fun way to incorporate maths and language into outdoor learning. However, the natural objects you find might also be used by animals! You can help to respect animals' homes by leaving plants, logs and rocks where you find them.

Conservation Activities

The "take only memories, leave only footprints," philosophy is designed to teach children that when

taking time in nature, it is important to leave wild areas as they have been found. To play, learn and respect our earth.

Some educational activities you may like to consider include;

A planting session.

A weeding session.

A rubbish collection day.

Please contact Council before any activity to seek approval and ensure that you are not intending to weed or plant in the wrong areas. Always ensure that participants have the appropriate safety equipment.

Children's Acknowledgement of Country

Darebin City Council is located on Wurundjeri Country. Before starting each session, an important way to begin is to share an Acknowledgment of Country. To simply explain to children; an Acknowledgement of Country to children is like if you're a guest at the birthday, you would say thank you for having me.

Encourage children to think about what it means to acknowledge Country. Guide children through a simple discussion with questions like;

- What are some special places on this Country?
- Have you always lived on the same Country?

When you arrive to your nature play session, always start with an Acknowledgement of Country. Here is a fun way all the children can be involved;

Here is the land, here is the sky.

Here are my friends and here am I.

We thank the Wurundjeri People people for the land on which we play and learn.

Hands up, hands down

We're on Wurundjeri ground.

Or;

Here is the Land, Here is the Sky

Here are my friends, and here am I

We play today on traditional Land

Our First Nation people, we walk hand in hand

We'd like to say thank you for letting us share

the Land that you love we promise to take care.

BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

PLAN BEFORE YOU GO

— Sign up for a site Induction Session. Our Bushland and Early Childhood Officers have a wealth of knowledge about Bush Kinder and the parks and reserves they manage. They can also help you to identify site-specific potential hazards in the area and explain how to make the most of your experience. To sign up for the next session, contact us at Darebinparks@darebin.vic.gov.au.

— Let us know that you are coming by calling Council on 8470 8888. This will give us the opportunity to share information with you about the best places and times to visit.

— Learn more about the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung People who are the Traditional Owners of the Land and share the children's Acknowledgement of Country for when you arrive on site.

— Check the weather conditions before you go.

— Make sure you are prepared with the right equipment including the correct footwear, sun protection, clothing and a first aid kit.

— Have a discussion with children about caring for the bush and how they can tread lightly and reduce rubbish.

— Prepare your risk management plan for your program. For more information please visit the [Kinder page at www.education.vic.gov.au/bush](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/bush)

Staying Safe

It is critical that effective early planning takes place to consider site specific risks and the health, wellbeing and safety of all participants. For the safety and wellbeing of your group, you should always conduct a site safety tour prior to the start of your session.

The following table outlines some of the potential risks and mitigation strategies to consider when learning and playing outdoors.

If you need further information, the Department of Education and Training has also outlined different types of risks that may occur in outdoor environments and how to prepare for them.

Our expert Bushland Officers are also here to help you. Call Council on 8470 8888 to discuss learning and safety measures and always remember to always have suitable supervision ratios and first aid kits available.

| RISK | MITIGATION STRATEGY |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Insect bite/sting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce the skin exposure with long sleeves, pants, socks and closed toe shoes - Stay on designated paths and tracks, do not walk through undergrowth - Always keep hands and fingers where you can see them - Apply insect repellent |
| Weather exposure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check weather conditions before departing - Ensure everyone has adequate water and appropriate clothing - Consider group placement in relation to sun, strong wind or rain |
| Scrapes or sprains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure appropriate shoes are always worn - Identify areas of uneven or unstable terrain apply caution when in these areas |
| Hit by falling branch | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trees can drop limbs at any time. For this reason, avoid being stationary under trees - Listen overhead for cracks and groans from tree branches - As wind speed increases, the greater the risk of falling branches |
| Harm from wildlife | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enjoy wildlife from a distance - Do not feed wildlife |
| Lost group member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regularly conduct head count and move as a group - Position supervisors at the front, middle and rear of the group - Wear high visible clothing while in the bush |
| Stranger interference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain constant supervision of children - Position group away from other park visitors |
| Snake bite | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remove child away from the snake - Ensure they rest and assist them to stay calm - Immediately call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance - Apply a pressure immobilisation bandage |
| Drowning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose a site away from immediate water risk - Maintain constant supervision of children |

BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

IMPORTANT REMINDER

Council acknowledges the time and effort it takes for groups to prepare nature play programs and activities. We also recognise that bush play programs are growing in popularity year on year. We are committed to working with organisations across Darebin, to ensure there are opportunities for participation.

What we ask groups to remember is that Council has the responsibility of caring for and maintaining the land. We have scheduled slashing, spraying and mowing in the areas that are used for nature play. These works must continue as scheduled to ensure sites can continue to be enjoyed by you and the Darebin community. Groups will need to be flexible and may be asked to move in order to keep your group safe.

Please also remember that no public open site can be claimed exclusively by any nature play group. Public open space is available for everyone to enjoy! It is important that nature play groups respect others who may also be seeking to access the site. Please be mindful to accommodate competing needs and interests.

We also ask for groups to remember that overuse of sites can cause significant damage and can erode years of important conservation work. As such, Council may prevent access to sites at different times. Please remember to register your intention to visit, so that we are able to work together to find a suitable alternative.



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Across the City of Darebin there are many reserves that cater for nature play experiences. Whether it is for a big group or an individual activity, there is something for everyone.

Below is a list of all reserves across the City of Darebin that cater for nature play.

Alphington

Darebin Parklands

Bundoora

Bundoora Park

Northcote

Merri Merri Park (Phillip's Reserve)

Reservoir

Edgar's Wetland Reserve

Thornbury

Strettle Reserve

Fez's Wetland (Dundas Street)

Mansfield Street (Darebin Creek Reserve)

Nature Play along the Darebin Creek

Gronn Street, Reservoir

Location: Gronn Street, next to 52 Ayr St, Reservoir. Travel 150m north along the Darebin Creek trail and you will reach the Natureplay area. (Melways: 19 D2).

Features: Logs for seating & climbing, Creek, Open grass areas. Be cautious of: Snakes, Bull-ants, Rubbish along the creek edge.

Access: Street parking is available along Ayr Street. There is a shared bike trail along the creek providing access from Main Yarra trail to Bundoora. Nearest public transport is a walk through Bundoora Park to Tram 86, or a walk to Invermay street to the 556 Bus. South)

Mrs Jens (Gronn Street, South)

Location: Gronn street, Reservoir, 150m south along the Darebin Creek trail is the natureplay area. (Melways: 19 D2)

Features: There are 2 main areas on the creek side of the shared trail that are allocated for Natureplay classrooms. With logs for seating & climbing, Areas for cubby's to be built, Open grass areas, and wildlife to spot. Be cautious of: Snakes, Bull-ants, Rubbish along the creek edge.

Access: Same as above with additional entry point as an open laneway adjacent to 30 Ayr Street.



● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Dundas Street and Fez's Wetland, Thornbury, Darebin Creek Reserve

Location: At the end of Dundas Street Thornbury (adjacent to 288 Dundas street) and at the end of Theobald street, Thornbury (next to 50 Theobald street) is the pedestrian access to the creek reserve near this Natureplay area. (Melways: 31 C4)

Features: There is a large area when you first enter the reserve with two arrangements of logs that can be used for outdoor classrooms. This area also allows for cubby making, on the open ground. The third classroom area is down the hill along the path next to Fez's Wetland. This area contains logs for seating and climbing, cubby building, mud-pies, etc. This area is also adjacent to the wetland, which is an opportunity to observe interesting wildlife.

The wetland itself is fenced off to exclude people disturbing the vegetation and wildlife but there are some viewing points. Be cautious of: Snakes, Bull-ants, discarded rubbish.

Access: Street Parking on Dundas or Theobald street. The sites are adjacent to the shared bike trail. It is close to the 567 Bus on Albert street.



Image: Fez's wetland



● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

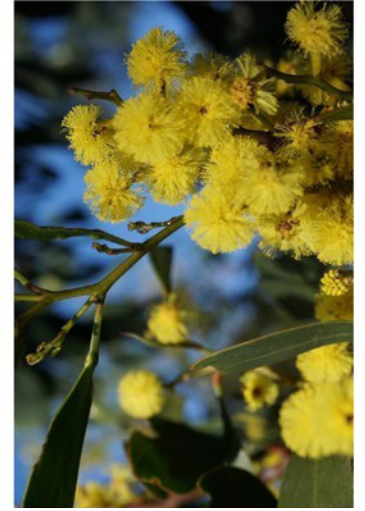
Mansfield Street Darebin Creek

Location: In the creek reserve closest to the end of Mansfield street, Thornbury & Rossmoyne street, Thornbury. (Melways: 31 B5) There are several revegetation garden beds in this area, but one main area near the shared trail is designated for Natureplay.

Features: A large mulched area with logs arranged for seating and climbing. Branches are regularly placed in this area allowing for cubbys to be made.

As well as lots of bugs and birds to keep an eye out for. Be cautious of: Snakes, Bull-ants, discarded rubbish.

Access: Street parking at Mansfield and Rossmoyne Streets. The site is located on the Darebin Creek shared trail that links with the Main Yarra trail. The site is a close walk to buses on Albert street.



Images: Sections of the Mansfield Street sites



● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Clarendon Street, Thornbury, Darein Creek

Location: Clarendon Street, Thornbury (Melways: 31 B6).

Features: A large mulched area with logs arranged for different uses. Shrubs and trees surrounding the area providing a lot of things to interact with. The small grouping of ground story plants in this area were planted and cared for by Natureplay learning staff. Be cautious of: Snakes, Bull-ants, discarded rubbish.

Access: Street park along Clarendon street, or in the new Narrandjeri Stadium (Darebin Rd Sports Centre). Site is located on a shared bike trail. The site is a close 500m walk to the 350 or 510 Buses.

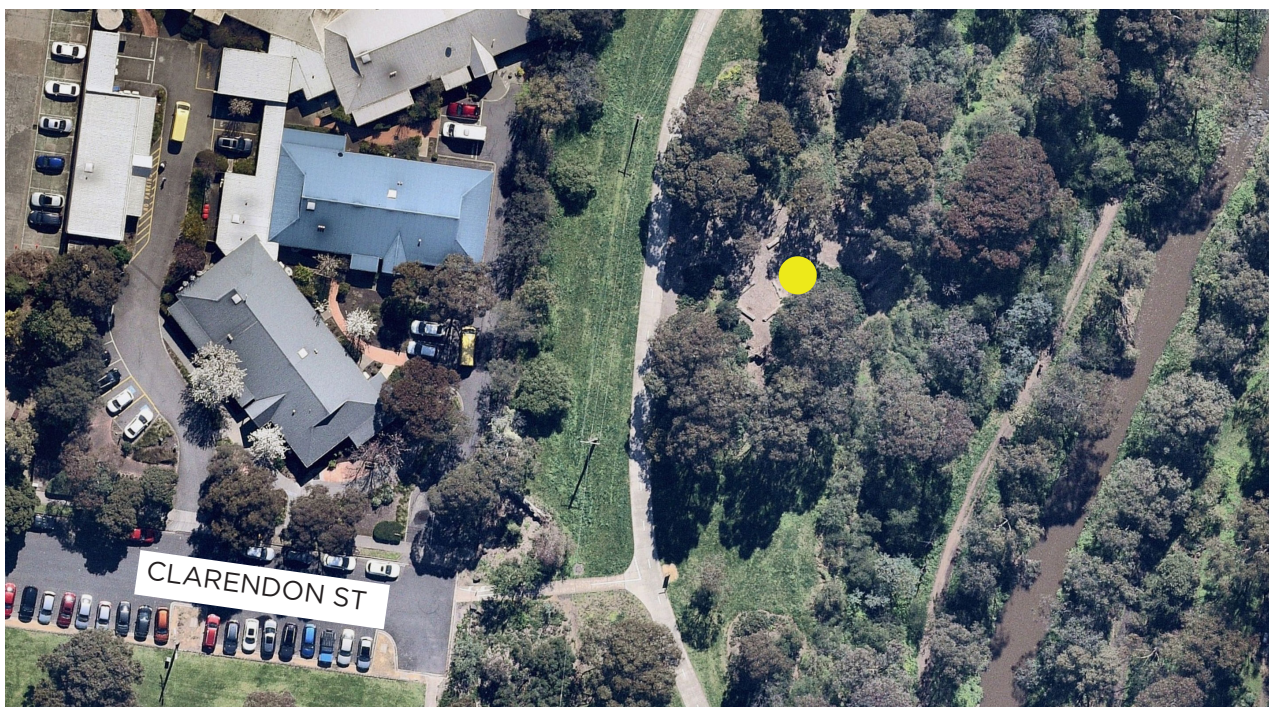


Images: Steppers for kids in Darebin



Image: Natureplay site in Clarendon Street

 Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Bundoora Park, Waters Way and Rathcown Road Bridge

Location: There is an area in Bundoora Park on the edge of the park and the grassland area. It is a mown area located about half way along Waters Way next to the grassland area and the golf course. The second area used in Bundoora park, is between Tee street and Rathcown Road Bridge, near trees and shrubs in the mown area along the Darebin Creek.

Features: First spot, is a grassy mown area occasionally used by natureplay groups as it is right next to the bushland reserve and there are lots of interesting things to look at. The second area is also a grassy mown area with some trees and shrubs around. Be cautious of: Snakes, especially along the footpath, Bull-ants, and Discarded rubbish.

Access: There is a pedestrian bridge that cross the creek into Bundoora Park at Rathcown Road.

There is also access through Bundoora Park itself, and Tee Street is very close. It is also adjacent to the Darebin Creek Shared trail.



Image: Fauna at Bundoora Park



Image: Natureplay at Bundoora Park

● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Nature Play in Strettle Bushland Reserve

Strettle Reserve is nestled along the Merri Creek in Thornbury. It is a great place to experience getting out in the outdoors and experiencing a bushland reserve. Sitting under a shady tree and enjoying the sounds of nature.

Location: 24-36 Strettle Street, Thornbury

Features: Include a BBQ, picnic shelter, public toilets and a water body

Activities:

- Balance on a log
- Make a shelter
- Invent your own obstacle course
- Listen for frogs and birds
- Create your own photographic safari (choose a subject or colour scheme)
- Play ABC of the bush (try and make it to Z)

- Collect nature things and sort them into categories (but remember to return them back where you found them)
- Design your own treasure hunt
- Listen for frogs and birds
- Make mud pies in the rain

Plants and animals: The local community have assisted council in planting a vast array of shrubs and trees.

These shrubs and trees are home to many tiny creatures such as insects, birds and small mammals.

These plants provide shelter for lizard's birds and frogs.

Access: Tram No11 West Preston to Victoria Harbour Docklands stop #28 Sumner Ave/St Georges Rd. Followed by a 5 minute walk.

Tram No11 West Preston to Victoria Harbour Docklands stop #37 Miller street/ Gilbert Rd. Then a 5 min walk



● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

WILD PLACES TO VISIT

Nature Play at Edgar's Wetland Reserve

Edgar's wetland nestled in the heart of Reservoir, is a hidden wetland delight. Take some time out to enjoy being in the outdoors. Listen for frogs and waterbirds.

Location: 113-119 Broadhurst Avenue Reservoir

Features

- Bushland
- Walking track
- Water body

Plants and animals

The local community have assisted council in planting a vast array of shrubs and trees.

These shrubs and trees are home to many tiny creatures such as insects, birds and small mammals.

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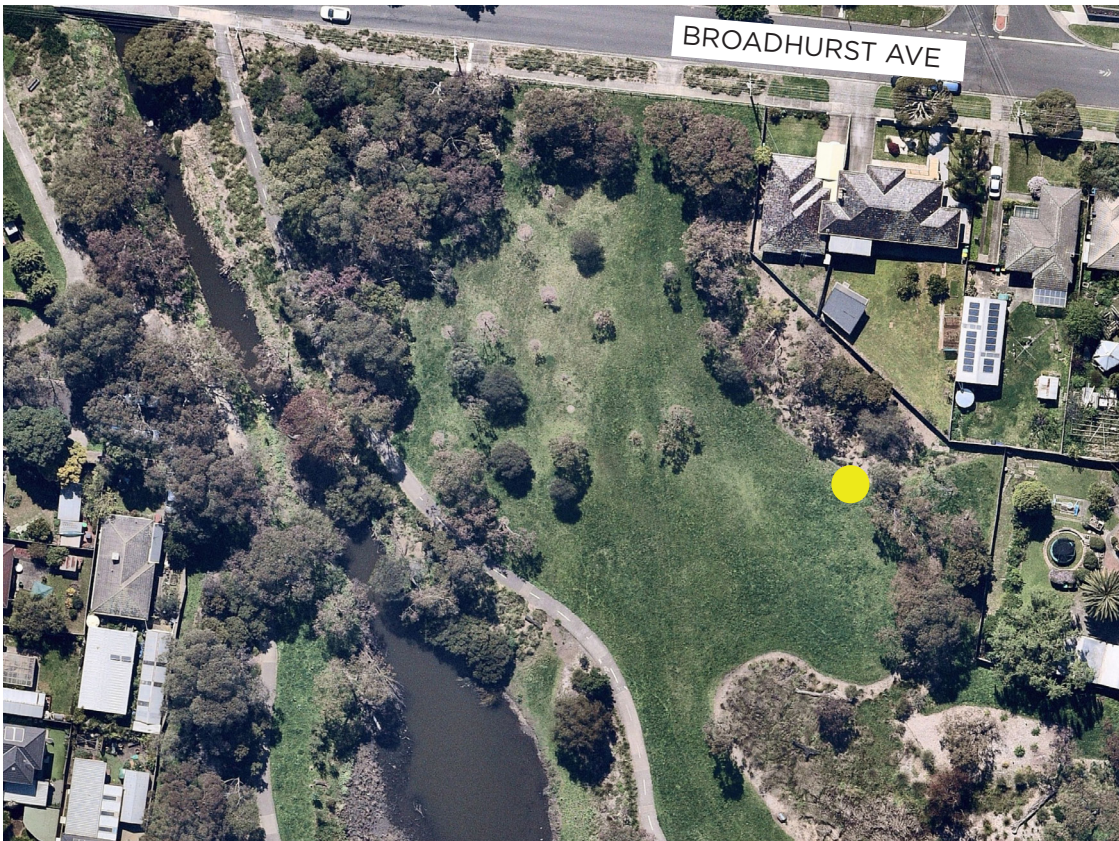
Public Transport

From Reservoir train station (crn Spring and Edwardes Street).

Bus No 558 stop #8 Edgar's creek wetlands/ Broadhurst Avenue Reservoir



Image: Logs at Edgar's Wetland Reserve



● Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

Nature Play in Merri Merri Park (Phillips Reserve)

Merri Merri Park is a bushland oasis situated on the Merri Creek in Northcote.

This revegetated park is great habitat for many birds and small mammals. Look up in the trees and try to spot the nest boxes and hollows, there is lots of native vegetation to immerse yourself in

Location: 1 Winifred Street Northcote

Features

- Bushland
- Walking track
- Water body

Plants and animals

The local community have assisted council in planting a vast array of shrubs and trees.

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These plants provide shelter for lizard's birds and frogs.

Public Transport

Tram No11 West Preston to Victoria Harbour Docklands stop #28 Sumner Ave/St Georges Rd. Then 5 min walk.



Image: Natureplay at Merri Merri Park

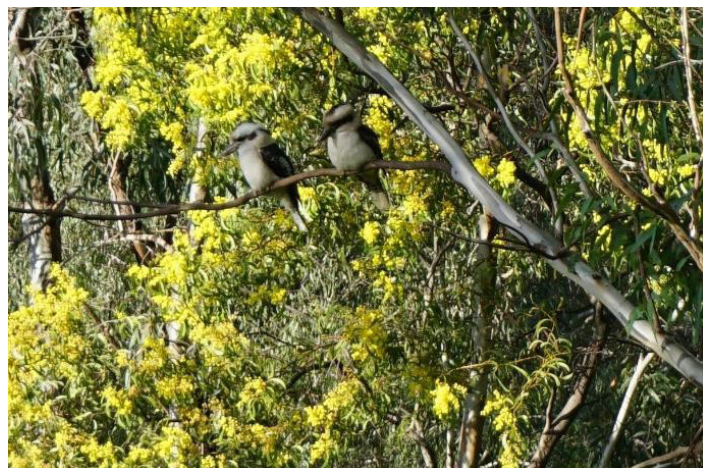


 Natureplay areas



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

EXAMPLES OF WILD PLACES IN DAREBIN



BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP IN DAREBIN

BUSH KINDER AND PLAYGROUP CHECKLIST

- Find a park near you.
- Visit the park to find a suitable outdoor learning site, and complete a risk assessment.
- Seek approval for your visit by calling 8470 8888 or emailing Darebinparks@darebin.vic.gov.au to ensure the site is safe and available on your intended visiting day.
- Get to know the Treading Lightly principles and share them with your class.
- Join a bush kinder site induction. During this session, Council Officers will answer your questions and share important lessons on how to lead a successful bush kinder and play experience.
- Check park conditions leading up to, and on the day of your visit(s).
- Have fun!

Looking after the park

- Leave everything as you found it.
- Take all belongings home with you.
- Respect plants and the environment.
- Respect animals and their habitats.



CONTACT US

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National Relay Service

TTY dial 133 677 or
Speak & Listen 1300 555 727
or iprelay.com.au, then enter
03 8470 8888



Speak Your Language

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