

# BUSHCARE

IN WOLLONGONG

By Elisa Arcioni

Wollongong Council is often in the limelight for less than favourable reasons, usually because of the action or inaction of a councillor. Behind those elected individuals, however, there are dedicated people working on effective programs to restore and repair the natural environment in our local area. One of those people is Paul Formosa, the Council's Natural Areas Coordinator. One of those programs is Bushcare.

Bushcare was launched in Wollongong in 1994, taking its inspiration from Kuring-gai Council who began their Bushcare program a decade earlier. It was started in Wollongong to answer a call for community participation in conservation and the need to provide the community with resources and information to do it.

What is it? Bushcare is a program whereby Wollongong Council supports local residents in revegetating and regenerating a local area of their choice. Residents nominate an area - a creek, foreshore, remnant piece of bushland or open space - which they want restored to its more natural state. The Council surveys it, identifies the weeds, threats, native species and prepares a management plan for the restoration. The residents provide the passion, labour and commitment and do the long-term work. The Council provides the botanical knowledge, bush regeneration expertise, materials, equipment, plants.

Local people are the key in starting the project and keeping it running, the Council is there only as support. The Council is the initial financier, working within the framework of the Natural Heritage Trust. Once a group gets going, they can apply for external funding to get trained bush regenerators to help out and money for bigger programs.

Bushcare is similar in philosophy to Landcare, Rivercare and Coastcare. Each is based on the community ownership of community land, backed by funding and resources from the local Council. It encourages participation of you in your local

area and awareness of environmental issues as they literally flow from your backyard into the wider environment around your house and block.

Bushcare in the Wollongong region has exploded, with over 40 groups, covering the areas of: Autinmer, Balgownie, Berkeley, Bulli, Coledale, Coniston, Cringila, Dapto, Farmborough Heights, Gwynneville, Helensburgh, Keiraville, Lake Heights, Mangerton, Mt Kembla, Mt Ousley, North Wollongong, Port Kembla, Russell Vale, Towradgi, Unanderra, Wollongong, Warrawong, Woonona, Yallah.

Each group usually meets once a month, for a few hours, to weed, plant and continue the process of bush regeneration. It doesn't take much time or work as long as it's regular. Check out the contact

details for a group near you - newcomers are always welcome, as there are no requirements of experience or knowledge, only a willingness to get involved. People really are the key to the program:

[www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/community/bushcare/index.html](http://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/community/bushcare/index.html)

and follow the links...

If there's nothing in your local area, start your own group!! Contact Paul Formosa, on 42 74 0055/ 0416 86464, or visit him during office hours in the new cream-coloured Botanical Gardens Admin building across the road from the western entrance to the university.

Bushcare's fun, easy and makes a real difference - it aims to achieve conservation in areas traditionally forgotten about, left as rubbish areas and falling out of the national park and reserve system. Most importantly, help keep part of the urban landscape green.

Elisa Arcioni



photo by Ed Muston

Steve Dillon teaching bush regeneration



Cutting and pasting Bitou Bush