

The Warrnambool Botanic Gardens Nature Based Play Space Design Intent Statement

The new nature based play space in the Warrnambool Botanic Gardens has been designed to engage children with plants and the heritage botanic gardens. The new space draws on a number of themes, the primary one being the site's location in a William Guilfoyle designed heritage botanic garden. New clambering logs and rock shards are a modern interpretation of the grotesque Victorian follies favoured by Guilfoyle, and the dramatic foliage plants draw on the site's gardenesque design themes.

Central to the design of the play space are three large logs, carefully arranged and carved to become balancing and clambering elements and gentle focal points. These were salvaged from large Monterey Cypress trees lost from the gardens, following industry best practice in the thoughtful salvage and repurposing of timber from heritage trees. These logs, and a large stump on site inspired the design, which is softened at each end to include a maze of clambering stumps and a ground level "canopy" of crossing logs interplanted with dramatic foliage plants. This canopy is reminiscent of the branches of a tree and provides opportunities for balancing, clambering and making cubbies.

Intersecting the log spine are a series of basalt shards, from the local stone which is such an essential part of Warrnambool's character. These shards will form gentle play elements and Victorian style focal points and have been designed as careful foils to show off the surrounding plants. This will create a similar effect to the shards in the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, while the log canopy is similar to that in Kyneton Botanic Gardens. The centre of the shards includes a small water play element, promoting creative and sensory play.

Integral to the design of the space is how the edges are carefully integrated into the heritage gardens. The original plan for Warrnambool Botanic Gardens by William Guilfoyle has been lost, but examination of his plans for other sites allow a good estimation to be made of what it would have included. The new play space is designed to ensure that design features typical of Guilfoyle's style are respected, especially dramatic foliage, screening planting around the entrance, and a thoughtful direction of views to the lake. Lawn mounds flowing into and along the play space further tie it into the wider landscape and respond to the picturesque flow of the site.

Planting for the site will be carefully chosen to reflect the site's history and future use, with all plants being able to withstand the rigours of playing children whilst also providing the bold foliage and colour typical of a Victorian era botanic garden. Proposals for planting include small copses of feature trees such as tree aloes and turpentine.

The new Nature Based Play Space will bring Warrnambool Botanic Gardens into line with other botanic gardens across Victoria including Melbourne, Kyneton, Benalla and Castlemaine Botanic Gardens. These play spaces are at the cutting edge of the work of Botanic Gardens, engaging the next generation in nature and inspiring a lifelong love of plants and the natural environment. Botanic Gardens have always had a mixed, and at time conflicting role, as both scientific institutions and important social gathering spaces. The new Warrnambool Botanic Gardens Nature Based Play Space provides for the best of both worlds.