

No/low mow zones

The Moths & Butterflies of NZ Trust (MBNZT) is a proponent of “no and low mow zones” nationwide.

As the name suggests, these are public park and reserve zones not mown, are mown infrequently, or are partially mown (perimeters, access routes). This practice is becoming more common, both here and overseas, with benefits to:

Biodiversity

- Unmown and meadow-style zones provide habitat and food for pollinators, beneficial insects, soil invertebrates – which in turn support birds and other wildlife.
- Many studies, including a [2023 study at the University of Otago](#), show a measurable increase in biodiversity.

Soil, Carbon and Water benefits

- Ground covered with multiple layers of plant material soaks up more rainwater, reducing likelihood of flooding. Stronger root systems may work against erosion.
- Reduced mowing lowers carbon emissions.
- Soil composition is enhanced.
- A low or no-mow area requires less water than a lawn.

Cost benefits

- Savings are made on capital expenditure, machine maintenance and fuel.
- Less use of herbicides.

Community

In some areas community groups are involved in planting and maintaining these areas, fostering engagement. The areas can also be used as outdoor classrooms.

There are challenges to this practice, of course, but that’s nature! At Auckland’s Botanic Gardens, we understand that, while they have a successful no-mow area, kikuyu, other weeds and pukeko were problematic in its establishment, and still need to be monitored.

Listed below are links to examples of trials and practice in New Zealand.

Auckland

It is difficult to get a definitive number of no/low-mow zones as each Local Board has its own guidelines. We do know, however, that they are numerous across the city. Some are higher profile, such as central Auckland's Grey Lynn Park but the majority are found on the city fringes and many

are found in areas not open to the public, such as stormwater catchment areas. A representative tells us that typically, mowing frequency is reduced from five times a year to once a year. They aim for foliage height of between 100-300mm.

As detailed above, savings made are of benefit to the city, and our pollinators benefit as a consequence.

Examples of exact locations are:

- Archibald Park, Archibald Rd, Kelston
- Balmoral Heights Reserve, Balmoral Rd, Mt Eden
- Corban Estate, Mt Lebanon Lane, Henderson (behind the South-West Pond)
- [Grey Lynn Park](#), Williamson Ave, Grey Lynn
- Parrs Park, West Coast Rd, Henderson (back tracks)
- Trusts Esplanade Reserve, Central Park Dr, Henderson (behind the playground)
- Watea Reserve, Haverstock Rd, Sandringham

Hamilton

The Hamilton City Council conducted several trials. After feedback from ratepayers at least three areas have been continued, as reported in the Waikato Times.

<https://www.waikatotimes.co.nz/nz-news/350076666/hamilton-city-council-trials-no-mow-meadows-boost-biodiversity-cut-emissions>

<https://www.waikatotimes.co.nz/nz-news/360885626/no-mow-no-more-some-hamilton-parks>

Kapiti

In 2023 the Kapiti District Council implemented a trial and found longer grass beneficial in rabbit management. Andy McKay, Team Leader, Environment and Ecological Services, told us they will continue to trial the practice in areas where there is little public use. Savings made budget-wise can be diverted to other areas. Reduced emissions are key to their environmental strategies.

<https://www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/council/news-and-information/news-and-stories/2023/november-2023/low-mow-trial/>

Wairarapa

The Carterton District Council is currently trialing no-mow zones as part of their climate change adaptation programme:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/580890/no-mow-trials-recycled-bags-carterton-s-push-for-climate-adaption>

Wellington

[Radio New Zealand reports on the Wellington City Council's low-mow lawn approach](#)

We are keen to hear of other examples, please email trust@nzbutterflies.org.nz if you have information to share.