

# Root of the Problem

## A GROWING CONCERN

Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council is always working to prevent sewage spills that can affect our environment and waterways, which can pose a public health problem. Most sewer blockages and spills are caused by tree roots finding their way into our sewer pipes. Root damage to sewer lines leads to clogged, overflowing, and slow-flowing drains. Root damage can also let stormwater into the pipes. During heavy rain, this extra water can overload the sewerage system causing it to overflow into our waterways and pollute the environment.



Root growth in pipes. Photo by Patrick de Beer of Pipevision.

## How tree roots can block pipes

A tree's root system will seek out the nutrients and water needed for its survival. If there is a tiny fracture or gap in your sewer or stormwater pipe, fine hair-like roots can penetrate the cracks looking for moisture.

Once inside, these tiny roots can grow into a mass, blocking and damaging the pipes and causing messy sewage spills.

## What happens when a sewer overflows

When a sewer pipe becomes blocked, sewage backs up and can overflow. If the blockage is on your property this can mean sewage overflowing into your toilet, bathroom or laundry. Other spills can flow into waterways, parks or onto footpaths.

## Avoiding damage to you sewer

The best way is to prevent tree roots from getting into the sewer and stormwater in the first place. If you are planning on planting a tree, find out where pipes are located on your property.

Points to consider when planting trees:

- Plant gardens and trees away from sewer lines.
- Avoid planting species which are likely to cause problems (see back of page).
- Consult your local nursery or garden guide to find out how large a tree or shrub will grow. A tree's roots will generally extend about 1 1/2 times the distance of the adult plants branches.
- Plants and trees indigenous to your area are often a good choice, as they are adapted to local conditions.



## Some plants to avoid

If you stop plant roots from re-entering your sewer lines, you will save yourself the expense of having to keep clearing them, and you will also protect the environment by keeping stormwater out of the sewer.

The following is a guide only. It is advisable to talk with your local nursery or arborist if you have any concerns about particular species.

Botanical Name	Common Name	Damage Rating
Cinnamomum Camphora	Camphor Laurel	Extreme
Ficus Species	Figs & Rubber Plants	Extreme
Populous Species	Poplars	Extreme
Salix Species	Willows	Extreme
Erythrina Species	Coral Trees	Very High
Eucalyptus Species	Large Gum Trees	Very High
Jacaranda Mimosifolia	Jacaranda	Very High
Liquidambar Styraacuflua	Liquidambar	Very High
Araucaria Species	Norfolk Island & Bunya	Very High
Brachychiton Acerifolium	Illawarra Flame Tree	Very High
Casuarina Cunninghamiana	Casuarinas	Very High
Melia Azedarach	Australian White Cedar	Very High
Pinus Species	Pine Trees	Very High
Platanus Acerifolia	Plane Trees	Very High
Schinus Molle	Pepper Trees	Very High
Ulmus Species Deciduous	Elms	Very High
Bougainvillea Species	Bougainvilleas	High
Casuarina Glauca	Swamp Oak	High
Cortaderia Selloana	Pampas Grass	High
Grevillia Robusta	Silky Oak	High
Ilex Species	Hollies	High
Lagunaria Patersonii	Norfolk Pines	High
Ligustrum Species	Privets	High
Magnolia Species	Magnolias	High
Nerium Oleander	Oleander	High
Phoenix Canariensis	Canary Island Date Palm	High
Phyllostachus Species	Bamboos	High
Rhus Species	Rhus Trees & Shrubs	High
Tristania Conferta	Brisbane Box	High
Wisteria Species	Wisteria	High

More information can be found at <http://www.qprc.nsw.gov.au/>

**Contact Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council: 1300 735 025**