ECO VINEYARDS
GROWING RESILIENCE NATURALLY

CASE STUDY

ESTABLISHING NATIVE EVERLASTING DAISIES IN THE MID-ROW AND ON BEETLE BANK CONTOURS AT SKILLOGALEE ESTATE, CLARE VALLEY, SA

By Kerri Thompson and Brendan Pudney, Skillogalee Estate, Emma McInerney, Ag Excellence Alliance and Dr Mary Retallack, Retallack Viticulture Pty Ltd

Wine Australia

SKILLOGALEE
CLARE VALLEY

retallack viticulture

ESTABLISHING NATIVE INSECTARY PLANTS

Background

Skillogalee is a family-owned winery set amongst the wooded hills of the picturesque Clare Valley and is home to 50 hectares of vineyards, a cellar door and restaurant which is open seven days a week and accommodation on-site.

Our cool climate vineyards, situated in the Skillogalee Valley were planted in 1970 and sit between 420 and 500 metres above sea level. Our white varietals include Riesling, Gewürztraminer and red varietals Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Grenache, and Muscat grapes. They are dry grown, contour planted, hand pruned and largely hand-picked.

The EcoVineyards project block is an area of approx. 1.3 hectares of dry grown 1970s contour planted Riesling located opposite the Estate cellar door and is referred to Block A4.

"This is terrain that demands attentive farming. This is not a vineyard chasing trends – it's one focused on legacy. We're working on Ngadjuri Land and take our role as current custodians to look after this place for future generations very seriously.

With a passionate team and a raft of plans ahead including our on-farm composting – there's no question the EcoVineyards projects have fuelled our fire. We share a great sense of excitement and energy about the future of this very special part of the world."

Kerri Thompson, Winemaker, Skillogalee Estate

Figure 1: EcoGrowers Kerri Thompson and Brendan Pudney [Photo: Mary Retallack].

What were you hoping to achieve and why?

- To create a sustainable low maintenance/low water environment which will include native plants and shrubs to beautify the cellar door entrance experience. This has also allowed us an opportunity to include an educational experience for our customers with the inclusion of communicative signage.
- We hope to show that by planting native grasses in the undervine and mid row areas, as well as the 'beetle bank' contour, we can eliminate ground working and improve soil structure in a dry grown environment with an overall improvement of the biodiversity and health of the vineyard ecosystem.

If you changed your project, what was the reason for the change?

Our original aim of our EcoVineyards project was to continue our focus on improving soil health and water holding capacity by comparing different compost treatments over different rows in the undervine area. As part of our ongoing management and improvement plan. However, we decided to roll out various compost treatments across the whole 50 ha property rather than limit to just the small EcoVineyards area.

In light of this change, it allowed us to fine tune the EcoVineyards project to continue our mid-row management focus by planting native everlasting flowers sourced from WA as well as a mix from SA in the mid rows of our E11 Gewürztraminer block. This is a 0.93 ha block located in front of the Skillogalee cellar door.

Our new focus was to further trial the improvement of soil structure and biodiversity in the ecosystem, in addition to continuing our beautification project, by being the first vineyard in South Australia to plant native flowers as mid-row cover.

What did you do and when?

We started by preparing the soil during June and July 2024 in similar preparation to our earlier wallaby grass planting work, we ploughed the mid rows and under vine areas three times before seeding. On the 15/8/24 Andrew Fairney from Seeding Natives Inc. seeded the following trial rows:

- Rows 1 to 5: Seeding Natives, SA mixed seed including *Chrysocephalum apiculatum,* common everlasting
- Rows 6 to 9: WA Formosa Flora, *Rhodanthe manglesii,* sunray everlasting
- Rows 9 to 15: WA everlastings
- Rows 19 to 15: WA Formosa Flora, *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* subsp. rosea, pink and white everlasting

Figure 2: Andrew Fairney, Seeding Natives mixing native grass and forb seeds with sawdust prior to planting (August 2024) [Photo: Kerri Thompson].

Figure 3: Seeding Natives, 'blue devil' native grass seeder in action at Skillogalee (August 2024) [Photo: Kerri Thompson].

Figure 4: Freshly sown *Rhodanthe manglesii,* sunray everlasting seeds (August 2024) [Photo: Kerri Thompson].

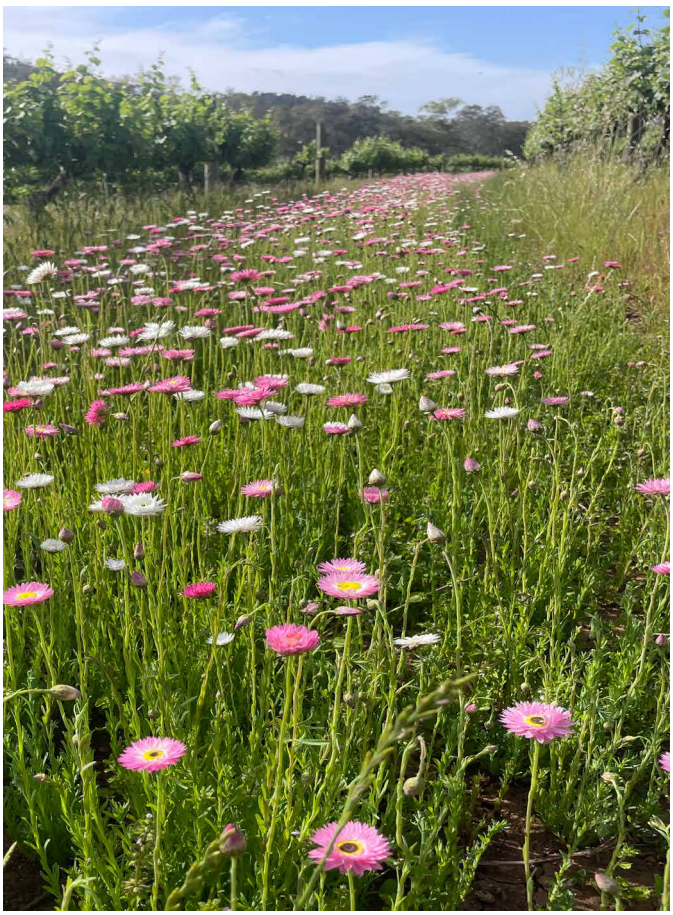

Figure 5: WA native everlasting daisies in full flower (November 2024) [Photo: Brendan Pudney].

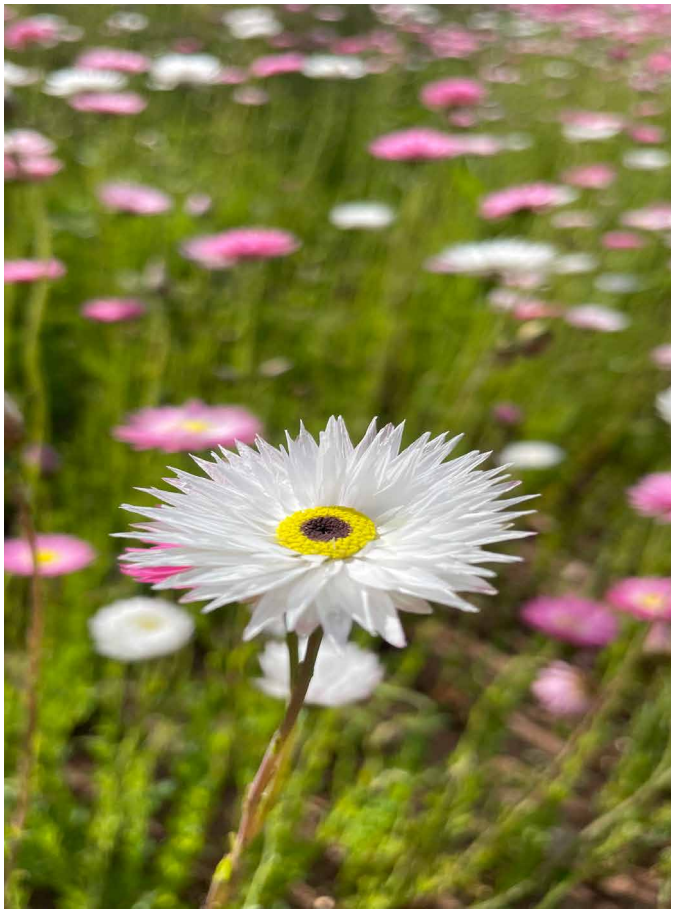

Figure 6: WA native everlasting daisies in full flower (November 2024) [Photo: Brendan Pudney].

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Bloomin' fantastic outcome

BY CHELSEA ASHMEADE

EVEN in one of the driest years South Australia has seen, the wildflowers and native grasses planted at Skillogalee Estate, in the Clare Valley region, have thrived.

Skillogalee's winemaker Kerri (KT) Thompson is "gob-smacked" at just how well the natives have done, especially the Western Australian everlasting daisies.

The vine rows in front of Skillogalee's restaurant and cellar door have burst with colour as the everlastings show off their ability to thrive even in tough growing conditions.

But while they were specifically planted in those rows, they served a greater purpose than to "just look pretty".

The everlastings, along with a number of other South Australian species and Australian native grasses, have been planted as part of the national EcoVineyards program.

Family-owned Skillogalee is the first South Australian vineyard to trial these mid-row species.

"I'm completely gob-smacked that they have grown in such a dry year," Ms Thompson said.

"If they can survive and grow and flourish in the driest season we have had, it's incredibly exciting."

Skillogalee joined EcoVineyards as an EcoGrower three years ago, with a number of projects designed to enrich soil health and biodiversity under way across the 170 hectare estate.

Planted mid-row, native plants are used to suppress weeds, improving the soil by opening up its structure, and support good bugs and pollinators - with the long-term goal of producing better fruit.

Ms Thompson said the aim was to improve biodiversity and soil health in the vineyards.

"As part of this project, we are committed to planting a number of native species, from SA and other parts of Australia, to compare their water needs and growth habits. We are working towards a permanent ground cover that will self seed and do its own thing."

Since becoming involved with the project, Ms Thompson said the Skillogalee team had planted more than 1500 native plants and grasses across the 55-hectare herbicide-free vineyard.

Recent testing revealed leaf Brix numbers on the trial block are the highest on the property.

They've also discovered there are three different species of microbat on the estate which Ms Thompson said they were thrilled to see as they "eat all the bad bugs".

"It has been a really important project for us."

Continued P3

Skillogalee Estate winemaker Kerri (KT) Thompson in a mid-row planted with everlastings as part of a plan to future-proof vineyards. Picture by Chelsea Ashmeade

Figure 7: Front page of the Stock Journal (November 2024) [Photo: Chelsea Ashmeade].

What worked well?

The highly successful germination, despite record-breaking dry conditions generated enormous interest with each of the Western Australian species that are growing strongly. It's really encouraging for our project. Even WA growers have been amazed at the growing success and the suppliers of the seed have been most helpful with their knowledge. Unfortunately the South Australian mixed seed has still not grown but given the significantly dry season we are hopeful the seed will still be there to germinate this year once it rains!

Going forward, we hope that the seed will naturally spread undervine thus improving weed suppression across the whole of the block and in turn reducing compaction and unnecessary tractor passes.

Any pitfalls to avoid?

When approaching the EcoVineyards project we were tempted to trial many ideas that we had been discussing during our first project involvement.

It's important to keep things streamlined to avoid over commitment and confusion. Obviously, there's little we can do in relation to weather, but seasonal conditions are of course very important in relation to seeding success.

Where to from here?

Formalising our philosophical approach to growing resilience naturally - with the help of the EcoVineyards program, has been a rewarding and all-inclusive learning experience for our team.

It feels good to build a connection to our land and work towards an overall improvement of the biodiversity and health of our vineyard ecosystem.

This is terrain that demands attentive farming. This is not a vineyard chasing trends – it's one focused on legacy. We're working on Ngadjuri land and take our role as current custodians to look after this place for future generations very seriously.

With a passionate team and a raft of plans ahead including our on-farm composting. There's no question the EcoVineyards projects have fuelled our fire. We share a great sense of excitement and energy about the future of this very special part of the world.

We plan to continue with a program of soil composts and amendments to continually improve the biological function of our soils, and to further plant native species into the vineyard for ongoing soil and biodiversity benefits.

What are you more aware of now?

Through our Eco Vineyards programme involvement, we have become very aware of the work native plants play in improving our biodiversity on site as well as the work they can play in relation to our mid row management programmes.

Any outstanding knowledge gaps you would like filled?

We're looking forward to continuing our onsite composting programme and reviewing soil health ongoing through regular testing. This will continue to improve our knowledge of the site.

What has been the most valuable aspect of the program for you personally?

It feels good to build a connection to our land and work towards an overall improvement of the biodiversity and health of our vineyard ecosystem. We look forward to continuing our EcoVineyards work as normal ongoing management.

Formalising our philosophical approach to growing resilience naturally with the help of the EcoVineyards program, has been a rewarding and all-inclusive learning experience for our team. I have grown my confidence and now have landscape gardeners calling me about native flowers!

Insights

The native species that we've enjoyed success with include:

- *Bursaria spinosa*, sweet bursaria
- *Dodonaea viscosa*, sticky hop bush
- *Eremophila maculata*, spotted emu bush
- *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*, blue gum
- *Hardenbergia violacea*, native lilac
- *Myoporum parvifolium*, creeping boobiala
- *Olearia ramulosa*, twiggy daisy bush
- *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* subsp. rosea, pink and white everlasting
- *Rhodanthe manglesii,* sunray everlasting
- *Rytidosperma caespitosum,* wallaby grass
- *Scaevola aemula*, fairy fan flower
- *Vitadinia blackaii,* New Holland daisy

Figure 8: Plant markers and educational signs helps to tell the Skillogalee EcoVIneyards story to visitors at the adjacent cellar door [Photo: Mary Retallack].

Figure 9: 'Beetle bank' planted on the contour with a range of mid storey shrubs including *Eremophila maculata*, spotted emu bush with Brendan Pudney and Kerri Thompson [Photo: Mary Retallack].

Plant list

#	Botanical name	Common name	#	Botanical name	Common name
1	*Atriplex nummularia*	old man saltbush	19	*Hardenbergia alba*	white native lilac
2	*Atriplex semibaccata*	creeping saltbush	20	*Hardenbergia violacea*	native lilac
3	*Brachyscome iberidifolia**	Swan River daisy	21	*Kennedia prostrata*	running postman
4	*Bursaria spinosa*	sweet bursaria	22	*Leptorhynchos squamatus*	scaly buttons
5	*Calocephalus citreus*	lemon beauty heads	23	*Linum marginale*	native flax
4	Carpobrotus modestus	inland pigface	24	*Microlaena stipoides*	weeping grass
5	*Chloris truncata*	windmill grass	25	*Myoporum parvifolium*	creeping boobiala
6	*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*	common everlasting	26	*Olearia ramulosa*	sticky hop bush
7	*Correa aemula*	hairy correa	27	*Ptilotus spathulatus*	pussy tails
8	*Correa glabra*	rock correa	28	*Pycnosorus globosus*	billy buttons
9	*Craspedia variabilis*	common billy buttons	29	*Rhodanthe chlorocephala* subsp. rosea	pink and white everlasting
10	*Cymbopogon ambiguus*	lemongrass	30	*Rhodanthe manglesii**	sunray everlasting
11	*Cymbopogon obtectus*	silky head lemongrass	31	*Rytidosperma caespitosum*	common wallaby grass
12	*Disphyma crassifolium*	pigface	32	*Scaevola aemula*	fairy fan Flower
13	*Dodonaea viscosa*	sticky hopbush	33	*Threlkeldia diffusa*	bonefruit
14	*Enchylaena tomentosa*	ruby saltbush	34	*Vittadinia blackaii*	narrow-leaf New Holland daisy
15	*Eremophila maculata*	emu bush	35	*Vittadinia cuneata*	fuzzy New Holland daisy
16	*Eutaxia microphylla*	eggs and bacon	36	*Vittadinia gracilis*	woolly New Holland daisy
17	*Goodenia albiflora*	white goodenia	37	*Wahlenbergia sp.*	native bluebell
18	*Goodenia pinnatifida*	cut leaf goodenia	38	*Xerochrysum bracteatum*	golden everlasting
*WA native					

Figure 10: Self sown WA native everlasting daisies in flower (September 2025) [Photo: Kerri Thompson].

Costs

Date	Item	Kg of seed	EcoVineyards costs (ex GST)	Co-contribution (grant and landholder contribution)
25/6/2024	Formosa Flora seed	4 kg	$1,850	$905
25/6/2024	WA Everlastings Seed	2 kg	$500	$27
18/9/2024	Seeding Natives seed and seeding		$1,650	
	EcoGrower contribution			$3,000
		6 kg	**$4,000**	**$3,932**

Disclaimer

For more information about the National EcoVineyards Program please visit www.ecovineyards.com.au @EcoVineyards

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

EcoVineyards proudly acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and their ongoing cultural and spiritual connection to this ancient land on which we work and live.

As the Traditional Custodians of this land, we recognise their wealth of ecological knowledge and the importance of caring for Country.

We pay our respects to elders past and present and extend this respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.


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