



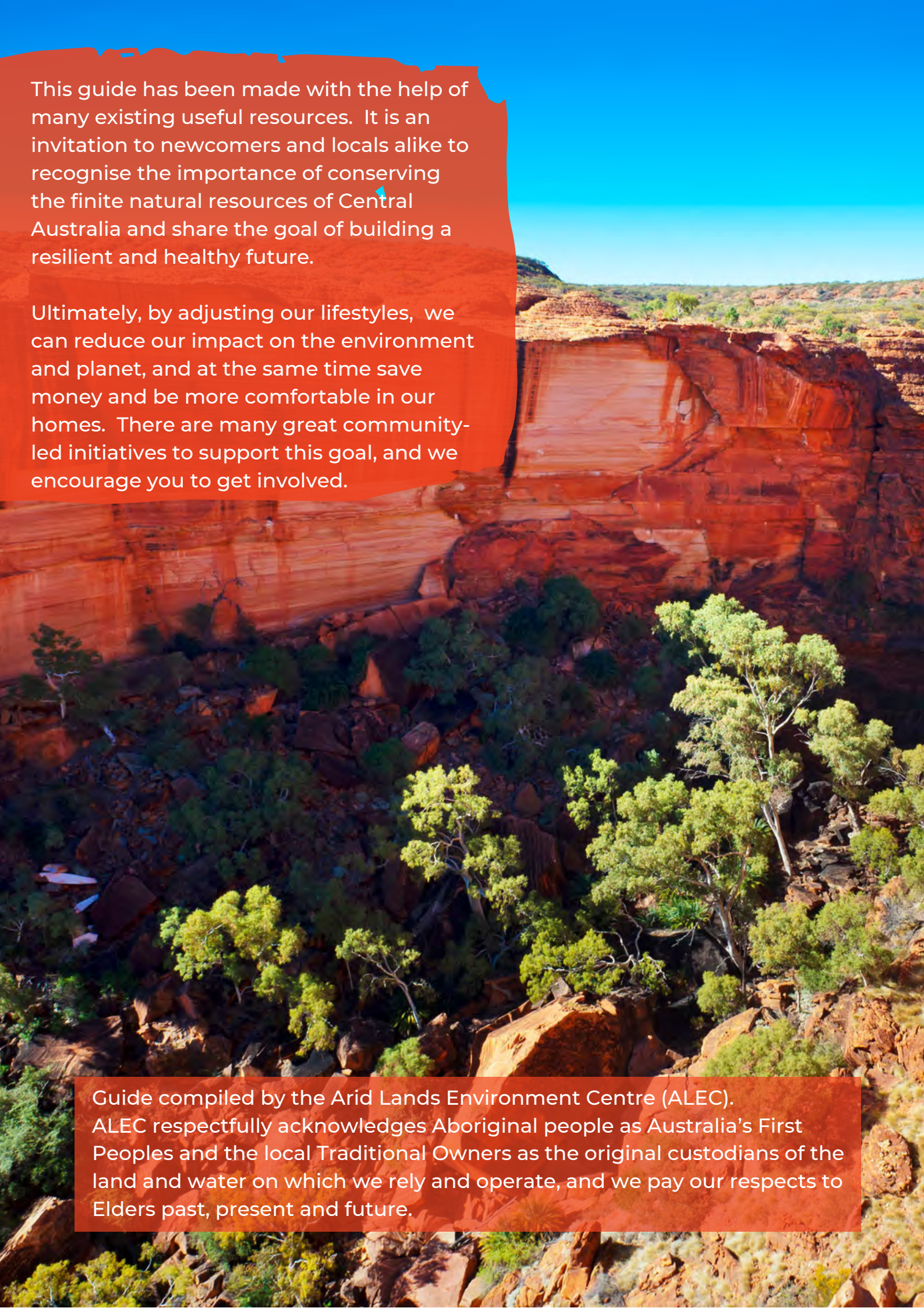
Arid
Lands
Environment
Centre

food · water · energy · waste ·
biodiversity · volunteering

Sustainable desert living guide

Practical tips for living more
sustainably in Central Australia



A scenic view of a red rock canyon. In the foreground, there are several green trees and shrubs growing on a rocky slope. The middle ground shows a steep, layered red rock cliff face. The background features a clear blue sky and distant hills.

This guide has been made with the help of many existing useful resources. It is an invitation to newcomers and locals alike to recognise the importance of conserving the finite natural resources of Central Australia and share the goal of building a resilient and healthy future.

Ultimately, by adjusting our lifestyles, we can reduce our impact on the environment and planet, and at the same time save money and be more comfortable in our homes. There are many great community-led initiatives to support this goal, and we encourage you to get involved.

Guide compiled by the Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC). ALEC respectfully acknowledges Aboriginal people as Australia's First Peoples and the local Traditional Owners as the original custodians of the land and water on which we rely and operate, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

Introduction

The unique desert environment and a vibrant, active community make Mparntwe Alice Springs a great place to live. As the community grows and new people arrive, we each need to consider how best to live here in a sustainable way.

Central Australia is a region of stunning natural and cultural landscapes and hosts a diversity of habitats and wildlife. But ecological challenges threaten our way of life in the desert. Biodiversity is being lost at an alarming rate, along with traditional Aboriginal knowledge and the loss of sacred Aboriginal sites.

Central Australia is already a place of climate extremes. Climate change will affect all of us, but it will hit the most vulnerable communities hardest. In many Indigenous communities — where people already experience inadequate housing, water scarcity and energy poverty — the impacts of climate change is a serious threat.

It is against this backdrop that our actions to cut emissions, protect biodiversity and conserve precious natural resources, like groundwater, become more important than ever before.

We've included information about ways that you can connect with local people, organisations and groups, so you too can become part of this thriving community while giving something back, and contributing to a more resilient future.



"The environment is always on the forefront of my mind. As a local Arrernte woman, environmental awareness and sustainability for my people is an area I'm most passionate about. We can do our own little bit at home to help by thinking more consciously about how we live and be proactive about changing our ways, eat, live and act with the environment in mind."

Growing produce and buying local

Growing at home and buying local not only helps to minimize your environmental impact, it has great health benefits as well. There are hundreds of bountiful backyards in and around Alice Springs, and plenty of space for more!

Before colonisation, Arrernte people sustained themselves for thousands of years, gathering food and medicine from this arid landscape. Until the 1970's Alice Springs grew most of its own veggies. Today the complexities and conveniences of modern life have taken over and commercially produced food travels large distances to get here.

Growing food is an empowering action that individuals and communities can take to reduce food miles and carbon footprints, and increase community resilience. The taste and quality of freshly picked produce is always beyond compare, without the need for pesticides and packaging. In a nutshell, home grown is cheap, good for you and good for the environment. And it's fun!



"I love the beauty, physicality and natural cycles inherent in gardening and there's always much to share and learn."

Bruce Simmons was instrumental in establishing Alice Springs' first Community Garden and since 2011 has volunteered tirelessly make sure that the plants and people of the Garden flourish.

Feeling inspired? There's lots of great food initiatives in town! You might want to...

Grow your own

A variety of vegetables, fruits and herbs can be grown in and around Alice Springs, some are easier than others, and all will do better with a little bit of planning and preparation. There are many local gardening gurus who have shared their in-depth knowledge of arid zone gardening over the years.

Check out the 'Alice Springs Veggie Garden Companion', and 'How to create a water wise garden in Central Australia' on the ALEC website:

➔ Visit www.alec.org.au/food



Buy local at Food for Alice

Food For Alice is a farmer's produce market connecting local people with local produce, as well as baked goods, honey and coffee. Make a visit to the Community Garden in East Side part of your Saturday morning routine to soak up the lovely community atmosphere and order a coffee from the volunteer-run cafe.



**Every Saturday
9 – 11 AM**

**Alice Springs
Community Garden
105 Burke St, East Side**



www.alec.org.au/food_for_alice

Get involved with the Community Gardens

Alice Springs has two community gardens where garden members can get involved in communal gardens or develop their own garden plot.

Alice Springs Community Garden

The Alice Springs Community Garden is located at Frances Smith Memorial Park, 105 Burke Street, East Side.

The garden is a thriving hub of activity and open to members and plot holders who pay an annual fee. With regular gardening bees, social meetups and events, there are lots of opportunities to get involved, share knowledge and meet new people.

Check the [website](#) or [Facebook](#) for details.



Westside Community Garden

Westside Garden is located at 56 Milner Rd Gillen, along the fence line between the Centralian Middle School and Jim McConville Oval. Established in late 2020, the Westside grows greener every day and will offer membership in early 2022. Everyone is welcome.

Westside's working bees are open to anyone and held regularly on the first and third Sunday and Thursday of every month. Check the [website](#) or [Facebook](#) for details.





Water matters, so be water-wise

Northern Territory households use the most water out of anywhere in Australia! Water is a precious resource in Central Australia. There are lots of ways you can help to save water in our town - good for the environment and your wallet.

90% of the water supply in the Territory comes from groundwater. Alice Springs' water supply comes from the the Mereenie aquifer system; a sequence of sandstones in the Amadeus Basin, which consists of water that is somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 years old.

The aquifer is slowly replenished at two gigalitres annually, but in Alice Springs we use over **nine gigalitres a year**. There is approximately 200-300 years of water supply left in Alice Springs' current water supply aquifer. But climate change and a rise in population means this could happen much sooner.

On average, sixty per cent of a Northern Territory household's water use is in the garden. So, the backyard is a great place to start when considering how you can cut back!

Save water inside your home

- Cut your shower time down to four minutes.
- Convert to a water efficient shower head.
- Install a water efficient dual flush toilet.
- Use a 5-star water efficient washing machine and other water efficient appliances.

Save water outside your home

- Wash the car on the lawn, use a trigger nozzle, rather than watering your cement. Same goes for the dog and bike.
- Fix a dripping tap immediately. One drip per second wastes 30 litres of water a day.
- Use a tap timer, so you don't forget to turn the garden watering system off.
- Don't mow your lawn too short. If the roots are shaded less water will evaporate.

Plus many more water saving tips on the ALEC website.



Singleton Station: one of Australia's largest water licences

You might be surprised to hear that in 2021 one of the largest water licences in Australia is found up the Stuart Highway in the Barkly region, near Ali Curung.

The Singleton Station Horticultural development is licenced to use over a trillion litres of water over 30 years. **That's twice the amount of water in Sydney Harbour, and 30 times as much water that is used in the entire Darwin region every year.**

The development may lower the groundwater table by 50 metres, threaten up to 40 sacred sites, impact 8 threatened species. This decision favors big agribusiness over culturally and environmentally responsible water management

Singleton Station water license [FAQ's](#)



In 2022, ALEC represented by the Environmental Defenders Office and Mpwerempwer Aboriginal Corporation represented by the CLC, each independently took the Northern Territory Government to the Supreme Court over the granting of this water licence.

Read more and support our work at alec.org.au/stopsingleton



Protecting biodiversity

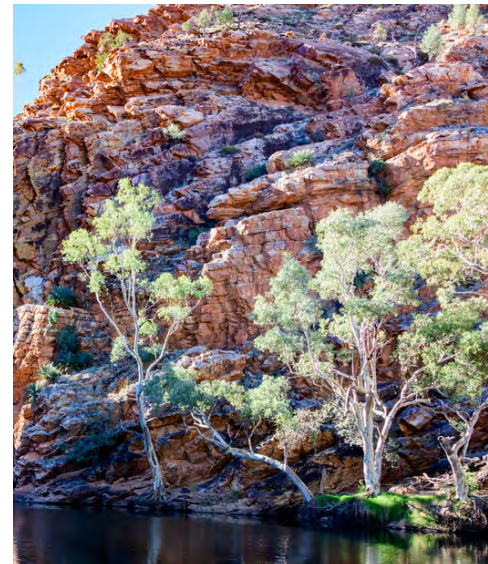
In Mparntwe Alice Springs, we're fortunate enough to have vast landscapes on our doorstep and unique flora and fauna in our backyard – like the threatened black-footed rock wallaby and the majestic Red River gums.

Biodiversity in your backyard

There are lots of ways you can help to promote biodiversity in your own backyard. Planting a native garden, making nest boxes, keeping your pets indoors and keeping an eye out for native birds and animals.

Spend time in nature with care

Red desert sands, spinifex dunes, ghost gums, rocky chasms and diverse wildlife - help keep these places special by visiting with care. Stay on marked walking tracks, take all your rubbish, camp in designated areas only and minimise contaminants in waterholes such as bug spray and sunscreen. Find a park to visit - nt.gov.au



The Red Centre has turned green and yellow

Buffel grass: the greatest threat to arid biodiversity

You may have noticed that Alice Springs, at the heart of the iconic Red Centre and Australia's arid zone looks distinctly more green after rain and yellow during dry times.

Buffel grass is one of the worst invaders of arid ecosystems worldwide, and the biggest invasive species threat to biodiversity and culture in Central Australia. Buffel out-competes native grasses and transforms entire habitats into a monoculture of buffel. It causes hotter, more frequent and more dangerous fires. It impacts the availability of bush tucker and threatens special places. It also puts many threatened species at greater risk of extinction.

There are lots of ways you can get involved and help stop the spread of buffel.



→ Learn more www.alec.org.au/stopbuffel
and at www.alec.org.au/biodiversity

Waste and recycling

Waste management and recycling is a major challenge in a remote location like Alice Springs. Changing the way we produce and use products to minimise waste and reduce environmental impact is even more important in the Red Centre.

The long distances to major recycling centres means that some forms of recycling are not cost-competitive. As such, Alice Springs does not have a curbside recycling service and much of our waste ends up in landfill.



Many residents choose to sort their recycling themselves and take it to the Regional Waste Management facility just past Heavitree Gap. It's a great way to reduce your footprint. Consider making it part of your weekend routine, or alternate recycling drop-offs with a friend or neighbour!

Cash for Containers scheme

As part of the Cash for Containers scheme, a 10c refund can be claimed for every eligible container returned.

The Council also offers a 10c refund for wine and spirit bottles on Saturdays only.



Recycling guide

What you can take to the waste facility



**Cardboard
(not paper)** ✓



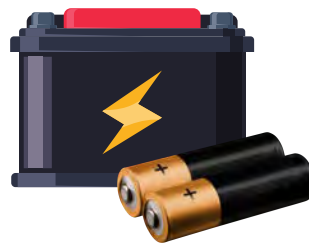
Glass bottles ✓



**Green waste
(no food scraps)** ✓



**Aluminium &
steel cans** ✓



**Household &
car batteries** ✓



**E-waste
(electronics)** ✓

Plastics recycling



You can drop HDPE 2 plastics off at the waste facility. Remember to first remove lids from bottles and containers. Common Number 2 plastics include:



- Milk, water, and juice bottles.
- Shampoo, soap and conditioner bottles.
- Household cleaners and detergents.



Other plastics that are not already covered by the Container Deposit Scheme and are not HDPE 2 plastics cannot be recycled at this stage. Such plastics include yoghurt and margarine cartons, cordial bottles and other household plastics.



Top energy saving tips to reduce your bills and carbon footprint, and help you live comfortably



In summer, set your air conditioner to 23C (or higher) and run your ceiling fans at the same time.

- This reduces humidity and distributes cold air more evenly.
- Every degree you lower your air conditioning in summer can increase its running cost by up to 10%.
- Close windows, curtains and blinds during the day to reduce heat.

In winter, set the temperature to 18C and wear warm clothing.

- Gas heaters and efficient reverse cycle air conditioners produce 1/3 the amount of greenhouse emissions than conventional electric heaters (Your Home, 2018).
- Consider zoning off one living area to heat and cool rather than warming the whole house. Seal off gaps and vents for winter.

Replace high-energy usage lighting (eg. halogen down lights) with low energy options (eg. LEDs).

- Lighting uses between 8 and 15% of the average household electricity budget.
- Most homes could reduce the amount of energy they use for lighting by 50% or more by making smarter lighting choices.

Install a water-saving shower-head and keep showers under 5 minutes.

- Halve your hot water consumption by installing a 3-star rated shower-head.
- Reduce showering time to under 5 minutes.

Clean your air conditioning system twice a year.

- A clogged up filter can increase your unit's running costs by 5% to 10% .

If you can, install solar panels and/or a battery, to take advantage of the sun's free energy!

- The NT Government offers a rebate on battery storage systems up to \$6000
- If you can, switch to solar hot water - it could supply up to 90% of your hot water.

Replace old appliances with high-energy star rating appliances.

- Every extra star in efficiency can reduce running costs by 10%..
- Although energy efficient appliances usually have higher purchase prices, their operating costs are 9-25% lower than conventional models

Composting

Turn your kitchen waste into 'black gold'

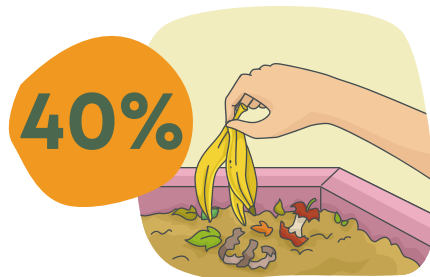
Reducing waste is a very effective way to minimize your impact on the environment. Be mindful of food waste by using up everything in the fridge. Composting at home is also a great way to reduce the amount of household waste that goes to landfill, and good compost is essential to sustainable food production in arid conditions.

While there is no curbside organics pick up service, residents can take their garden waste - such as leaves, twigs and grass clippings - to the tip for recycling. Food scraps can't be taken to the tip, so turn kitchen waste into compost at home.

When food scraps and other organic materials are sent to landfill, they begin to rot anaerobically (without oxygen) and release greenhouse gases. Composting helps to prevent the release of methane during organic matter breakdown.



Alice Springs produces 7.6kg organic waste per household a week



Almost 40% of waste in our landfill is compostable organic material.

Buy less, repurpose more

Before buying new, consider visiting one of Alice's many op shops and breathing new life into some old. There are also many retailers repurposing old items and transforming them into beautiful, funky new pieces, either locally, or via online shops.

For example, check out www.sustainable-couture.com



Join the **Alice Springs Zero Waste** Facebook group. Share ideas and tips for reducing waste in town.





Alice Springs is a vibrant and growing community with a diverse cultural heritage, unique identity and desert environment. Getting involved in one of the many environmentally-focused community groups or organisations is a great way to meet people, become part of the community and make a positive contribution to Central Australia.

Central Australia Frack Free Alliance

Central Australian Frack Free Alliance (CAFFA) is a grassroots movement with the goal to protect water, communities and country by opposing unconventional gas extraction in the NT. CAFFA is looking for new members to join the local campaign against fracking in 2022. To learn more, visit:

www.alec.org.au/caffa



Volunteer at Food for Alice

If you're passionate about local food and produce and want to meet people in the community, this is for you. Volunteering might include selling organic food, receiving produce from local growers and set up and pack down, all while enjoying the great atmosphere at the East Side Garden. Shifts are three hours, 8.30-11.30 AM on a Saturday morning.

www.alec.org.au/foodforalice



Letters for the Environment Central Australia (LECA)

A single letter can raise awareness and hold governments, leaders and decision makers to account. A flood of mail can lead to dramatic change.

LECA is a community group that meets every month to write directly to those in positions of power and influence on specific environmental issues, for environmental accountability and change.

Find them on Facebook!
Search LECA



Alice Springs Landcare

This great group brings people together to share knowledge and take action to maintain and improve the health of their local natural environment. Volunteer with Alice Springs Landcare to help look after local natural places, or as a local wildlife carer.

www.alicespringslandcare.com

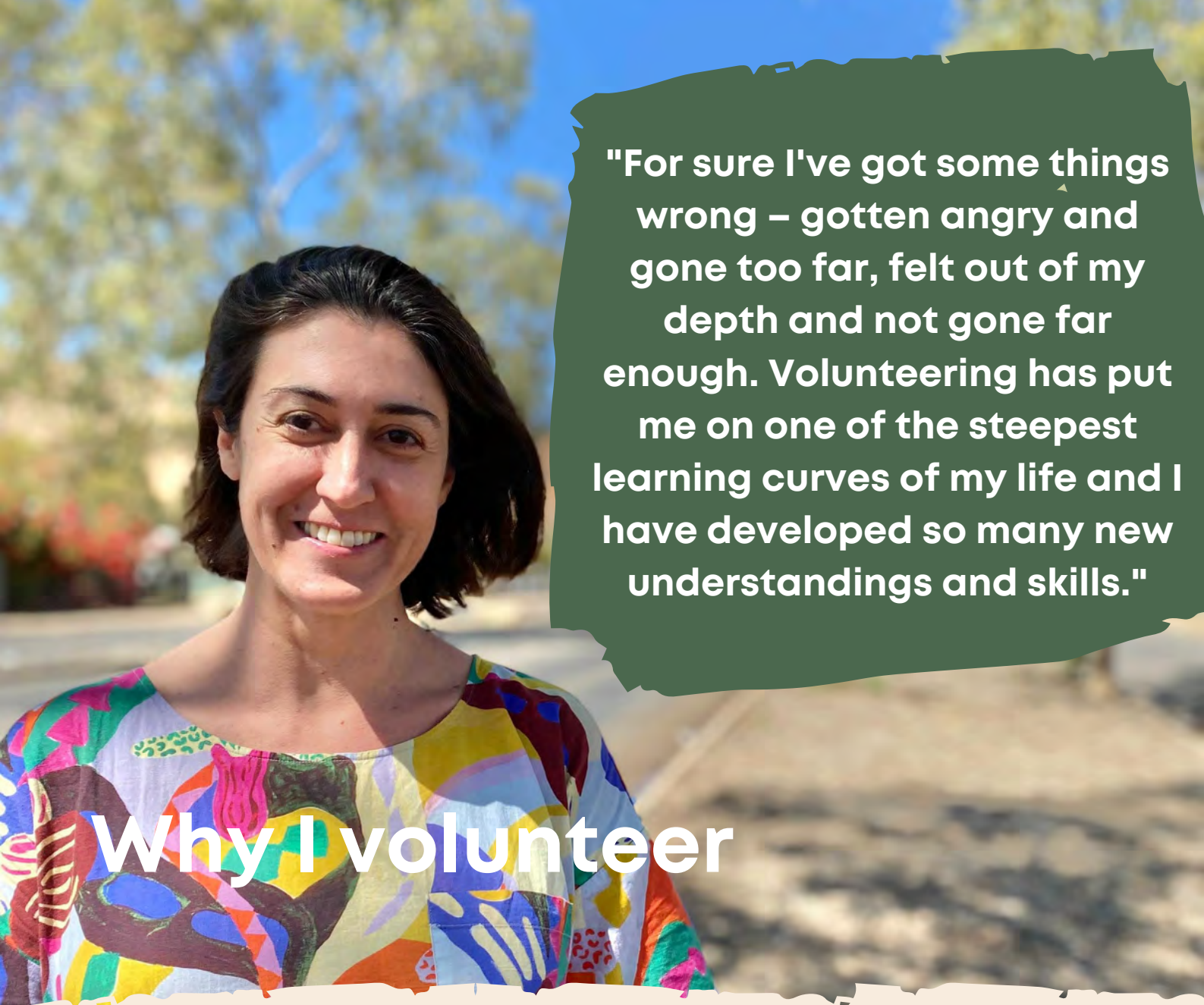


Become a member of the Arid Lands Environment Centre

Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) is central Australia's peak environmental organisation; defending Australia's iconic desert country for 40 years. Members join with other passionate people to support the protection of our desert environment and communities.

Membership is just \$30 annually, or \$10 for concession.

www.alec.org.au/become_a_member



"For sure I've got some things wrong – gotten angry and gone too far, felt out of my depth and not gone far enough. Volunteering has put me on one of the steepest learning curves of my life and I have developed so many new understandings and skills."

Why I volunteer

Jacqui's story

I recently returned to my home town of Alice Springs after several years away. I was shocked by the degradation of the landscape. The buffel grass! Deep water holes of my childhood - disappeared under hooves and weeds.

So in 2020, I formed Letters for the Environment Central Australia (LECA) with the aim of providing structure for myself and a resource for others in the community wanting to learn and act in an evidence-based way.

In April 2021, we started the 'Buffel Grass Information and Action Group'. We have just started working on a dingo protection campaign and look forward to turning our attention to stock and feral animals in permanent and ephemeral water holes.

Volunteering has been time-consuming, confronting, exposing, and empowering. I have received the most amazing encouragement and support from individuals and organisations.

From buffel busting action to letter writing, Jacqueline is one of many local environmental activists working individually and together to protect the desert.

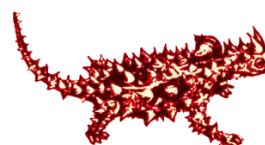
Arid Lands Environment Centre is Central Australia's peak environmental organisation. We are a strong and trusted voice for the Outback. We work tirelessly toward our vision of healthy futures for arid lands and people.

Support our work at:

www.alec.org.au/desert_defenders



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www.alec.org.au



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