

SYNERGY

THE TERRACOTTEM ADVANTAGE

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BIG TREE

BIG TRUCK, BIG HOLE

Imagine a project with just five holes and five plants to go into them. Then imagine that those five plants cost around \$35,000. If you were responsible for a project like this you'd probably be very focused on taking every step to help each of those plants live long, luscious and thriving lives...



Large lush trees and tropical plants have transformed the Cairns CBD.



The Cairns CBD is currently in the throes of a horticultural makeover thanks to a master plan. Over the next five years, the twelve streets are progressively being given the treatment which can only be described as fabulously top shelf - a must given this inner city landscape's high profile. Brenton Hull, horticulturalist with the Cairns Regional Council, is responsible for the green aspects of this master plan, and by green we mean the themed massed plantings and a growing army of seriously glorious trees.

"It's more than just aesthetics, of creating a vibrant tropical hub to the city. There's a practical aspect to the plan as well. These significant trees and plantings will offer more shade which in turn helps to cool the streets and the shop fronts." And as all the studies show, if you put looks and function together, people are drawn into these spaces, they linger, they appreciate and they value them.

Under the new street designs, the oh-too-tight planting-wells with long-suffering street trees are being replaced with generous beds filled with trees and massed underplanting. The objective here is to shift the emphasis from paved surfaces to planted spaces with a lot more projected shade. That in itself isn't a tough call for Brenton's team, but two added factors have made things a little more interesting - these trees are seriously whopping in scale and they've needed settling-in during Cairns' dry season.

Working in tandem with Vince Spranklin and the Council's works team, it's a finely tuned logistical dance now that they're onto their fourth street. The first step, sourcing the trees close to home, proved tough thanks to cyclones Larry (2006) and Yasi (2011). "There was no mature stock in North Queensland so we went south, initially looking at photos and talking to suppliers then flying down to look at the trees myself. Once we'd located what we were looking for it was a case of giving the supplier the delivery date for them to work back from."

These trees have typically been over five metres tall and they're field grown in root-supporting cages. Before the trees are ready to roll, a series of steps takes place typically involving tree spades, root stimulating hormones, attentive irrigation and some serious root ball and canopy gift wrapping. They're then loaded onto a pantech and driven north for two days with the driver in constant contact with Brenton's team in Cairns...

... who meanwhile have been feverishly preparing the site in readiness. "We dig five by five metre holes to a depth of 1.5 depending on any services beneath, then set out the irrigation conduit for the pop-ups before backfilling with my special mix which includes TerraCottem. Before the truck arrives, we've been given the root ball size so we'll have a fresh hole ready."

Planting involves unpacking the tree and giving it a top to toe inspection by an arborist before each tree is craned into position, treated with hormones and fungicides then stabilised with rope (for its brilliant flexing qualities). A watering regimen follows which challenges a non-local's perception of tropical Cairns: Monday, Wednesday and Fridays at two am the pop-ups are active for 20 minutes given it's the dry season when between April and December virtually no rain falls.

Standing looking at some of the trees which were planted in March 2012 (in Abbott Street, one of Cairns' main thoroughfares), the growth is obvious. "They've exceeded my expectations. They went in at 5.5 metres and they are now seven metres high only 14 months later."

Clearly there are many factors contributing to this horticultural success story and it reads like a text book - quality plant stock, a good landscape design which maximises growing conditions and brilliant preparation. Add to this a skilled and experienced team led by someone who by their own description is happy to do things outside the box, and you end up with results like this. The good people of Cairns will be enjoying a significant shift in their city's landscape for decades to come.

The instant greening of Abbott Street.

CAIRNS CITY GARDENERS

Brenton Hull's horticultural team operates like something out of a last-century English manorial estate. They move through the Cairns CBD with wheelbarrows to give the city's garden plantings the sort of care usually reserved for private bespoke gardens. As Brenton puts it, it's a case of quality maintenance being more important than time-saving measures. "The city must look good." And it's in this context that TerraCottem was first specified five years ago. "We tinkered with different soils and application rates before we came up with the optimum application for Cairns - and I firmly believe it has a positive effect."



THE TC ADVANTAGE

TC Advantage is a package deal. It's about supplying TerraCottem along with all the training, technical specification and compliance needed to turn a tricky project into a genuine long-term success. So when anyone has a turf, street tree or revegetation project to tackle, bringing in the TC Advantage expertise means you get training so that it's applied for maximum benefit; and monitoring to ensure compliance within the project's specs. As for TerraCottem, it's a brilliant soil-conditioning treatment because it works on several fronts at the same time...

To start with, it uses two main mechanisms to encourage substantial root development – copolymers and root growth precursors.

The copolymers are a little like water-holding crystals except that TerraCottem's hydroabsorbent co-polymers have been carefully selected and well researched. This means that instead of just one polymer with a narrow water-holding and water-releasing ability, there is a group of them providing the same function over a wide range, for years. To put it crudely, more water can be stored and released under a broader variety of conditions.

As for the root growth precursors, by definition a precursor is a chemical compound which leads to another. The precursors found in TerraCottem do exactly this, and for a very good reason. If you put growth hormones into soil, they rapidly biodegrade. But if you put precursors into the root zone, the plants get a kick-start by synthesising their own growth hormones. And this conducive environment – for optimum cell division and elongation – stays like this for 12 months.

Then there is a nicely varied collection of plant nutrients – soluble mineral fertilisers, in a format suited to the early growth phase of a plant; slow-release fertilisers, designed to offer a constant source of food over many months; and synthesised organic fertilisers which focus on the soil, stimulating microbiological activity and general soil health.

Add this all together and the result is fast and furious root establishment. This means greater accessibility to water, fewer losses, and, given the reciprocal dynamic between roots and canopy, noticeably vigorous growth. In the longer term, the soil-conditioning power of TerraCottem means that plantings are buffered from stress. It's great stuff.



TERRACOTTEM®