

SYNERGY

THE TERRACOTTEM ADVANTAGE

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THE CONVERTED SCEPTIC

“I’ve seen thousands of dollars go down that track. Had we gone this way earlier we’d still have those trees today.” In this particular instance Terry Herbert may be talking about trees, but his approach is the same for all the planting he manages. He comes across both as someone quick to spot the snake oil, but also willing to share with others a tip that really works. Which is why TerraCottem is a part of the vast majority of plantings in and around the City of Coffs Harbour. But it was not always so...



A previously failed planting in Coff's Harbour Drive is replaced. Trainee Horticulturist Shane McIver, plants *Elaeocarpus eumundii* (Quandong) in amongst the *Liriope*. Using the right planting technique, and buffering with TerraCottem, produces trees for the long term.

Terry is one of the two open space co-ordinators at Coffs (Ron Francis is the other). Where his remit was once the whole gambit – nursery, general parks, trees, special projects, cemeteries and the botanic gardens – for some years now it's been divided between the two men. Working alongside each other means the work load is more reasonable and each has the other to call upon as a professional resource. Within this scenario resources are used to the max and any fluff soon falls by the wayside.

“About ten years ago I'd had a chat with Russ about TerraCottem and said to let me know when he'd be coming so I could get my supervisors in to hear what he had to say. And when he did show up, there were plenty of sceptics in the room, jumping out with comments like, “I've tried this stuff before”, and, “It's expensive”. But Russ just rolled out the councils who were already using it and suggested they ring them to have a chat.”

Which they did, because despite sitting in a sub-tropical location, Coffs Harbour's climate includes a glitch which can seriously knock plantings around. “Being where we are, we very rarely irrigate, but we do get dry times – about three months' long – and in a wet area like Coffs Harbour this dry spell severely affects plants to the point where they aren't able to cope without assistance.” Terry clearly saw the need for a buffer, to tide things over until the next rainfall.

So the Park Beach Plaza trial was set up. A tricky retaining bank was planted out on the main shopping precinct using TerraCottem. One section of the planting was deliberately TerraCottem-free to act as a control. “The control group didn't do well – we've replaced them.”

From that moment on, TerraCottem was progressively rolled out. Staff were trained (there were a few mishandlings in the early days) and TerraCottem became part of the process when a new planting – including trees – entered the ground. And that's where we come back to Terry's comment about the dollars wasted before TerraCottem. “If you put in a tree, you want it to live, not be a miserable plant all its life. And if you treat it right in the first years, giving it the right start, you'll get a good tree. Our street trees do very well.”

But perhaps the biggest converts have been those involved in bush regeneration. “They cover large areas with compensatory planting and are now the biggest users given they have few resources to cover returning to a site to deal with plant loss.” External organisations like Landcare Australia are also strongly encouraged to use TerraCottem within selected natural areas. “When these areas, which are outside our control miss out on TerraCottem, there's a decline over time. Hence we've convinced Council's Landscape Architect (Cherelle Brooke) and Strategic design teams to include it within the design specifications to ensure it's considered. This makes sense as most of those projects eventually become Parks assets to maintain, so it's in our extended interest to push its inclusion.”

Right: Another area where previous planting had failed thanks to shallow soils and a clay substrate – Saltwater Park Corindi Beach Village. Replanted with success by the Coffs team, this photo was taken two years after replanting. Below: Coffs Bush Regeneration department plants out large areas like this roadside embankment along the Pacific Highway. With limited resources to return to deal with plant failure, TerraCottem is a useful tool.





THE TC ADVANTAGE

THE BULK SOLUTION

Clever as the Coffs crew have been, to spot TerraCottem and use it well, they've outdone themselves with their inspired bulk-buying scenario. Of course this works best where there's a very happy relationship between the disparate areas falling under the banner of parks and recreation. In this case, all the players have come together with some help from Council's purchasing department, to let them pool their orders. Everyone – the nursery, street trees, revegetation, the botanic gardens, general parks, whatever – are supplied from a bulk centralised order that's automatically re-ordered when a pre-determined trigger point is reached. Everyone has what they need, even those players that deal in low volumes. A brilliant solution all round.



TC Advantage is a package deal. It's about supplying TerraCottem (more about that in a minute), 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, revegetation or whatever project to tackle, bringing in the TC Advantage expertise means you get: advice on which TerraCottem product to specify; 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 various fronts at the same time...

To start with, it uses two main mechanisms to encourage substantial root development – polymers and root growth precursors. The polymers are a little like water-holding crystals except that TerraCottem's hydroabsorbent 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. (To put it precisely for specification purposes: TerraCottem has an absorption capacity of a minimum of 4500 g H₂O/100 g in distilled water using Method of Analysis CEN EN 13041, with a minimum of 90% of the water contained in the polymers being plant available.)

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®

TC Advantage P/L FREECALL 1800 658 281 Email: info@terracottem.com.au Web: www.terracottem.com.au