

# SYNERGY

THE TERRACOTTEM ADVANTAGE

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## THE BIG BUSH BLOCK

This will seem unbelievable. There's a man in South Australia whose day-job is filled with managing horticulture for a local council, and on the weekends he often goes up to work on his own bush block – revegetating and weeding. Not so weird you say? Yes it is, because his block is 600 acres of desert mallee with no water, and he's pretty much doing it alone.



One man's vision and work: revegetating an arid landscape armed with his years of know-how.



Mark Winston is neither a fool nor someone with self-destructive tendencies. He happily attributes his current situation to two main factors: "Land at Steinfeld is cheap and I've an interest in biodiversity." And when he tells his story you start to appreciate why he loves what he's doing. . .

The land Mark bought back in 2010 from the original German settler family is flat, half of which is open forest (dominated by *Eucalyptus gracilis* and *E. oleosa*), with the remainder as open grasslands. The soil is free-draining - limestone topped by clay loam - which is good news for revegetation but tough going when you're digging fence post holes. Initially the only structure on site were the ruins of the Hahn family's original stone cottage, but given the block is 90 minutes from home, Mark has since added a caravan, a carport and a tank: comfort and a means to gather and store rainwater.

Not that there's much of that. "We'd get between 350 and 500 millimetres of rain a year. There is a bore but it's too salty for irrigation so I cart 350 litres with me each time I go." This water plays an important part in the cycle of what goes on each visit - a text book approach to increasing biodiversity while reducing weeds, with the usual limited resources (money, manpower and water).

In the hands of other well-meaning but less savvy operators, this project would quickly become overwhelming. Luckily for Mark, his work-related expertise informs his approach. While he's been doing most of it himself (countless hours), he strategically applied for support through the BushBid program (via the South Australian Murray Darling Basin NRM Board). "They assessed the site for biodiversity and gave me funding to carry out the necessary works over five years." Mark was understandably thrilled to find out his bid had been successful (that was July 2011), and with the hope that it would be, he'd already collected seed from the site and begun propagating tube stocks to plant as soon as possible.

In the first planting season (late April, when the soil warms), 300 tubes went in and for each year since then, 100 more have followed. "I look for degraded areas - former sheep pasture - where I can replant native grasses and trees to create wildlife corridors." Mark's process is standard: dig a hole, pop in the tube stock and attempt to protect it from the wombats, kangaroos and rabbits with a tree guard. Mark estimates that this initial approach achieved a take rate of around 70 per cent, so after the first year, he began planting with TerraCottem and the rate jumped to 95. "The thing is, the growth rate is twice as fast: within a year the plants are coming out of the corflutes."

Mark's commitment is obvious when you start asking him about weed control and irrigation. Each time he visits the block he spends three and a half hours irrigating and between four and five hours spot weeding. "I'm following the Bradley method: working from the best bush out and hitting hard wherever there are known infestations. It's ongoing, but my aim is to get the horehound, wild sage, thistle, wards and onion weed under control."

With only a year left with the BushBid support, a huge amount has been achieved towards Mark's dream - to go up to enjoy the block surrounded by the diversity of wildlife he appreciates and values.

*It may seem simple, but it's all about getting the planting spot on: use tube stock grown from locally sources seed; buffer the young plant with TerraCottem; and give them the physical protection with staked tree guards.*



The decision to add TerraCottem into the process paid off: the first plants which were planted without TerraCottem took two full years to reach the top of the guards (bottom). Later plantings with TerraCottem are well above the guards at the first year mark (top).

# THE TC ADVANTAGE

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 H<sub>2</sub>O/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®**

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