

SYNERGY

THE TERRACOTTEM ADVANTAGE

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HAND IN HAND

If you've ever had all your ducks in a row, you'll know what a brilliant feeling it is. Everything seems to speed up, nothing goes wrong, and the result is impossibly gratifying. And if you stop to work out why your working day has gone so well, it's very likely due to three things: the right people, the right skills, the right resources. This story is all about a town where the revegetation-ducks have been lining up in a row for some years now, and the place is appropriately greener because of it...



Working together with Council, Landcare's many willing hands are making a big impact.



Blair Reserve was a weed infested remnant when the team began work in 2008. Once the Madeira Vine, Syngonium, Morning Glory, Wild Tobacco and Lantana had been knocked back, a multi-layered planting was put in.

Port Macquarie is a beautiful town, sitting about half way between Sydney and the Queensland border. Most people who visit would quickly see why Estelle Gough (and her husband and daughter) decided to move there in 1998. It's not too busy, it's surrounded by water and the weather is fabulous. Strangely, none of these ranked as highly on Estelle's wish list as the fact that, as she puts it, "it has great vegetation corridors that were begging to be looked after."

"My mother always said that you had to have a plan, so I thought about what I liked doing, which was gardening. I'd become interested in the native side of things and I thought I would like to help to look after the bush, to return it to the way it was before settlement." So once the Goughs had settled into their new home, Estelle joined the Friends of Kooloonbung Creek and worked for a few years helping to weed and restore an ecological balance to just over 50 hectares near the town centre. She was living her retirement plan and it suited her very well - so well in fact that she added another day to her bush work commitment by joining the Landcare group out at the Old Quarry site. Soon she'd added more days to her week, one working at the Lilly Pond and another at Lighthouse Beach. And then one day, when vandals destroyed a new planting, she offered to help repair the damage by growing the replacement plants.

"I'd always been interested in growing things and so I was happy to fill the courtyard at my place with polystyrene boxes. Things began to get a bit cramped, so I went across the road to the primary school and then later the high school where I was given a bit more space. Then a wonderful National Parks and Wildlife

ranger came to me and offered one of the depot's green houses, and it grew from there."

At this point the Port Macquarie Landcare group had expanded to care for five sites around town. It had capacity for generating much of its own plant material and was enjoying the benefits of Estelle's 'retired' skills and motivation. And then something happened which would prove to be the catalyst for even greater things. "Council initiated a bushland management review, employing the services of Bill Peel, a consultant expert in ecology; and Bill was subsequently employed to implement the proposal."

The Council's dedicated bushland team was increased to include teams for noxious weed control and regeneration, and in one of those moments where things come together with brilliant simplicity, Landcare stepped forward to swell their ranks and follow the shared goal. "We provide through our volunteers the equivalent of six full time employees in this wonderful partnership."

Together Council and Landcare have made good use of the classic approach - working from the top of the catchment down - stretching funding to fabulous lengths. Primary knockdown is followed by revegetation and an ongoing regimen of observation and maintenance. The results have been well beyond just rewarding, thanks to the strategic attack and the clever use of resources. It's also not every Council that has a sympathetic Landcare group like the one at Port Macquarie, nor is it every Landcare group that enjoys a relationship of mutual respect with its local council. Port Macquarie Landcare now grows around 25,000 indigenous species a year and looks after 16 sites on Council Managed Bushland Reserves.



This shot, taken in 2014, shows what can be achieved with weed control, the right plant selection and skilled timing.

BENEATH THE GREEN.

There's another thing Council and Landcare at Port Macquarie agree on – TerraCottem.



I learnt about TerraCottem through the Council and I've never gone away from it. We plant with it, water everything in on the planting day then go back again a week later. If we've had a really hot spell then we might go back and water again, but it's the TerraCottem which makes it possible to have so few visits. Where we use it, we don't have failures. I've never gone back to a planting and thought, Well that was a waste of time. I think of it as a labour-saving device because it frees up time to us to do other things.

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 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®

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