

SYNERGY

THE TERRACOTTEM ADVANTAGE

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TIM'S TERRITORY

It's almost too massive to imagine, the sales area that Tim Sharpe covers. If you take Perth's Swan River as a starting point, it forms Tim's northern boundary. The Indian Ocean lies along the western edge, the Great Australian Bight the southern, while the Western Australia border closes out the east. This area may be large but at least Tim's task is straightforward – to make sure that everyone knows TerraCottem exists, and what it's capable of. Further down the track, he also plays a part in helping them get the results they were expecting...



When this *Agonis flexuosa* avenue went in, the planting stock had clearly outgrown their containers. They faced a sand profile with poor water retention, no irrigation, no natural rainfall in coming months and a high risk of vandalism. TerraCottem and a limited establishment water regime produced the success you see here.

Tim's been doing this since 2012 and in that time, he's supported an incredibly broad set of projects from an equally mixed list of clients: from private residential to commercial landscapes, local councils, educational institutions, land care groups and government agencies like Main Roads WA and the state's Department of Parks and Wildlife. When you look at the list you get a sense that wherever you spot plantings that look relaxed and happy, there must be TerraCottem in the soil beneath them.

And that's the whole point. It's about getting any project to the point where the plants go into the ground in a way that means they'll establish quickly, grow well, look good, and need minimum maintenance - establishment or otherwise. But it's something that's not easy to achieve in many situations in Western Australia's south.

"Technically we have what is termed a Mediterranean climate. Our winters tend to be wet thanks to a certain window of rain, then this is followed by dry summers with nothing for two to three months. Near the coast the soils are sandy so there's the usual issue with very little water retention, poor nutrient values and high evaporative rates. Yes, the soils improve as you move inland – they become more clay-based – but the further you are from the coast, the less rainfall you enjoy."

Looking at this scenario, one factor pops up – water. It's both the solution and the problem. An unlimited supply certainly boosts a landscaping project. But if you don't have much water to work with, then you need to get clever.



According to Tim, working in this industry is hugely rewarding. "It's good to help people achieve the results they need. At the most fundamental and genuine level, getting plants to thrive in difficult landscapes produces something people enjoy."



The city of South Perth's experience has been clear cut - trees planted with the buffer of TerraCottem survive and thrive. Those that aren't, struggle or fail.



“One of our clients is John Murray, the City of South Perth’s Streetscapes and Environment Supervisor. He pushes the boundaries with TerraCottem because he has to: he’s been asked to plant twice as many trees but with only his existing water truck to do the rounds during establishment.” John’s solution was to make the TerraCottem work as well as possible. In Tim’s view, it’s worked so well for South Perth that they’ve actually saved money – to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars over the years. “If you make it work hard for you, it will save you money.”

This is something Tim puts down in writing routinely as part of his role. Not only does he arrive on site during installations to supply technical support to on-ground adjustments, but he also pulls together cost benefit analyses, often as part of submissions. “You need to know what it will cost over the project and what cost-savings benefits can be expected.”

That TerraCottem is a water warrior is easy to appreciate. It’s the other factors it brings into the picture that are less understood, and in the context of Tim’s region, these play an important role. A quirky trial being run down alongside the Swan River’s edge is a good example of it’s boosting a soils ability to hold itself together let alone water and nutrients.

“The river bank needs re-establishment to help reduce erosion and so this client is testing out an approach where the 1300 or so riparian plants are being propagated in coir cells before being planted out. The trouble began in the nursery where watering the cells leached the soil out through the coir. The original plantings were then re-done, this time putting TerraCottem in with the mix and it sealed the cells and locked the plants in place.” It’s early days yet, but so far at the planted site, it’s looking good. It’s also a great example of what TerraCottem can achieve in the ground, with particular relevance to leached out, sandy soils anywhere.

The first batch of coir cell planting – part of a riparian revegetation trial – was a disaster. TerraCottem was added to the mix to help the cells to hold their contents.

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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