

SYNERGY

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TERRACOTTEM
ADVANTAGE

THEN AND NOW



There's a great story behind TerraCottem, and it's wrapped around two people: Russell James and Tarrant Baguley. Russ knows all about the beginning because he was there. Taz came into the picture a little later on and he's the man with an eye on the future. It's a tale filled with international origins, a fair dose of initial disbelief, crushing periods of drought and many happy endings. Once upon a time...

"It hit my radar in the mid nineties when we had the Agriturf business. A bloke was booked to see us about stocking something called TerraCottem and I thought, what a waste of time that will be. I knew a lot about that style of tech – water-storing crystals – and I knew it didn't work."

Who would have thought Russell's original view would do a flip, but not before he'd done a lot of research. "I remember taking a look at the literature he'd left us with and felt that it had some credibility given it came out of a university project in a part of the world that had a good reputation for hort innovation."

They decided to test the TerraCottem out, to see for themselves if it lived up to the claims. They kept an eye on the first projects it was put into: one in particular was an ideal assessment scenario. "A row of Callistemons went in at Sydney Airport, some with TerraCottem and some without, and the difference was stark. This was the point where I first went, wow, this could be a great product."



During the next 12 months, Russell did his homework directly with the International supplier in Belgium. "Given the results I was seeing, I wanted to understand why it works when other stuff on the market doesn't." As his understanding grew, so did a relationship with the Belgians. Russell's company soon became the east coast distributor and then in 1998, the national source. At this point drought stepped in as a catalyst for change. Sales for herbicides and fertilisers stalled as the big dry settled in for a prolonged stretch. It made perfect sense to shed the Agriturf business and set up a new one purely focussed on TerraCottem, a product that could help everyone out and make a difference.

This early trial at Sydney airport says it all: spot the Callistemons that went in with TerraCottem against the ones in the foreground that missed out.

“It was a different type of business because we were selling support alongside the TerraCottem”, and by support Russell is talking about a package. From the moment the TerraCottem agent walked in, they became part of the team. They knew how TC could help, how best to put it into the landscape. Training workshops brought operations staff up to speed. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation information was fed back into the loop for an even greater understanding to everyone’s benefit.

Sales were great, and the three people on the road were very time poor – along with Russell there was fellow industry veteran Colin Wise, and Tarrant Baguely who was then relatively new to the business. They were all run off their feet because while TerraCottem may have been a fresh product in the Australian setting back in the mid nineties, by 2007 it was well understood and much used. More importantly, thanks to the body of information that had been and was still being gathered through the monitoring and evaluations, everyone was learning how to make it work even harder for them. “Together, we all became experts in the field.”



Fast forward to the present. Tarrant is now TerraCottem’s National Manager freeing Russell to pick up on internal projects that demand attention thanks to the growth of the business. (He’s also writing a book, but that’s another story.) As for that growth, from Tarrant’s perspective, that hasn’t been surprising given, “TerraCottem works”.

Over the years, Tarrant has seen plantings go into the ground with TC, and watched those projects head into their first stress period in summer. Standing on site alongside contractors, public open space managers, landscape architects and turf specialists, everyone can see that the results are good. Not wasting words, Tarrant sums it neatly, “Healthy growth”.

He’s seen it at Darling Park where a landscape of lawns and flowering beds was created on a perched slab. He’s seen the tree establishment when the streets of post-fire Canberra were replanted. And he’s currently seeing TerraCottem work its effect on a brand new, built from scratch jewel of a sportsfield at Googong in the ACT.

When the TerraCottem business began to take off, keeping a work-family balance wasn’t easy: Russell with his family, taking time off work to bring the latest addition home from the hospital.



And in every case he understands why TerraCottem has been specified. The landscape architects at Darling Park knew they needed something added into the soil mix to help hold nutrients and moisture given the profile wasn't deep. Canberra's many hundreds of street trees needed buffering in a climate that challenges most species with very cold winters and hot summers. And as far as the Googong field goes, it was put in by a farsighted group who understand the long-term benefits of giving a community a high spec facility that will endure.

At Darling Park, TerraCottem made it possible to put this jewel of a landscape onto a concrete slab.

As for the future, Tarrant expects to see more of the same. Alongside Tarrant (who covers New South Wales, the ACT and the Northern Territory), there are other TerraCottem specialists in the team: Tim Sharpe (South Australia and southern Western Australia), Gavin Fawkes (northern Western Australia), and Nathan Straume (Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania). "We're out there working to help our clients get their results. If TerraCottem can help, we support the process." And that support is carried along well past planting day. "We'll meet with them at the tail end of the first summer after planting; we'll go out and take a look at the projects." It's always a good moment, reconfirming that the TerraCottem was worth specifying.

A TERRACOTTEM SNAPSHOT A robust, good looking plant – whether it’s turf or a tree – has a healthy root system. The secret to resilience is to boost root development, and to achieve it, you look to the soil. Time tested methods are based on compost which, when added to the soil, work by adding and holding nutrients, retaining moisture, and hosting the complex world of microbial activity that’s essential to healthy plants. But there are situations when compost isn’t practical: it may not be readily available; it may be too bulky to ship in; using it may risk introducing contaminating seeds and disease; its make-up can be inconsistent; it’s lifespan limited; and if it’s not fully composted, it takes valuable nitrogen from the existing soil. As an alternative, TerraCottem was developed through a research program mounted by Prof. Dr. Willem Van Cotthem and a team from the Laboratory of Plant Morphology, Systematics and Ecology at the University of Ghent (Belgium). The program’s systematic trials in the field – the Sahel region of Africa – produced the combination of materials we know today as TerraCottem. This particular combination of hydroabsorbent, nutritive and root growth stimulating components, together offer the advantages of compost, but in a compact form with a great shelf life.



It's not surprising that TerraCottem performed so well in Australian drought given it was developed by the University of Ghent as part of a humanitarian effort to green up drought ravaged Burkina Faso. Above: prior to planting in 1988, and below, the landscape ten years later.



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®