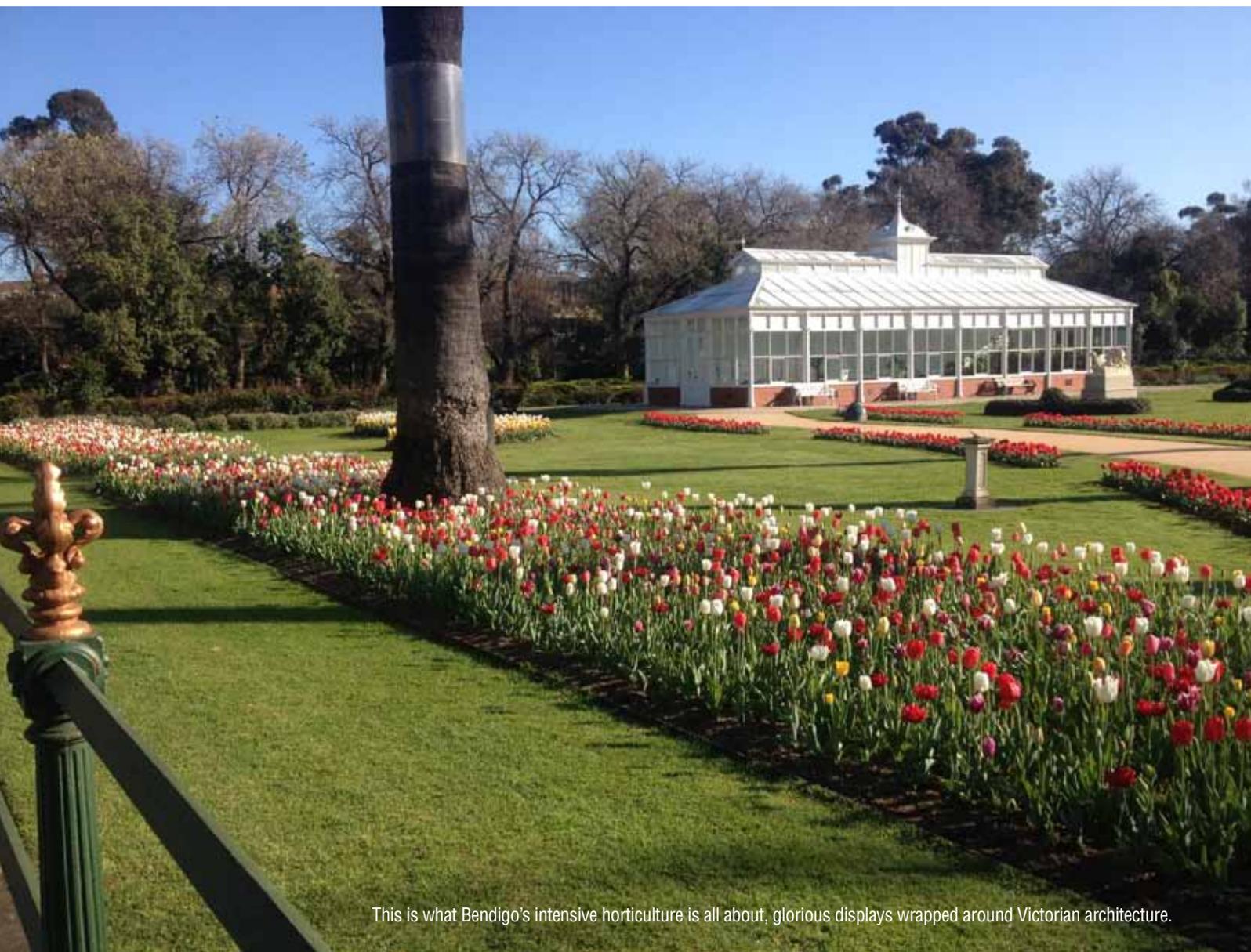


# SYNERGY

**35** THE  
TERRACOTTEM  
ADVANTAGE

# FLOWER POWER



This is what Bendigo's intensive horticulture is all about, glorious displays wrapped around Victorian architecture.

If you're in the hort industry, you know that each green space has its own character and quirks – and some spaces are more quirky than others. Take the green space smack at the epicentre of Victoria's Bendigo. Drive up the Calder Highway and by the time it's calling itself Pall Mall you can't possibly miss the fact that this City was built in Victorian times by people who had managed to find a fair amount of gold. It's a Victoriana-fest, including the green spaces between these gorgeous buildings. It's these gardens that are the responsibility of the City of Greater Bendigo's Brendan Beale and his intensive horticulture team...

The fact that they are called the intensive team hints at what's involved. Their work schedule doesn't just cycle between turf, trees and renovating a permanent understorey once every three years. No way. Victorian architecture demands formal beds filled with full blown, colourful, carpet-bedding schemes. "We manage two displays a year, planting out the seedlings in November-December to produce a display from summer through to late Autumn, and then another in winter."

With this style of horticulture there is no-where to hide. The areas that Brendan's team manage are highly visible given they dress the spaces near buildings of key visitation: the visitors' centre, gallery, conservatory and historic post office. This space is also the setting for events such as the annual Easter Festival with its 50,000 visitors. Successful plantings are a must, but up until three years ago, 'success' might not be the word best chosen to describe the plantings.

And the people of Bendigo – and it's many visitors – Love the result. So much so that these carefully crafted green spaces are the setting each year for the City's celebrations.



“We had problems with the soil in the beds. We’d tried various composting regimes and these had left us with nutrient rich soil – overly so – but with pH issues and weeds. The seedlings were struggling.” The fix came from an unexpected angle – a dose of TerraCottem – which interestingly sorted things on several fronts.

“We left the beds fallow for a season of six months, chemically treated the weeds that emerged from the seed bank in our compost rich soil, and setting up interpretive signage to help explain what we were doing. Our aim was to add the soil conditioner to the beds to balance the pH and the rest would hopefully work itself out over time. I didn’t expect it to be a quick fix but we noticed the results instantly. Our first planting of petunias, which we’d planted very early, lasted a full five months and looked great. And I think the beds are looking better year after year.”

Brendan isn’t calling TerraCottem a wonder treatment, but rather something which shifted the balance so that things could work themselves out. He explains that the style of planted beds means mulch just isn’t practical, doesn’t look right and can lead to a host of mildewy diseases. By reducing the weed seeds in the previously composted soil, the team can now keep them under control without resorting to mulch by leaping in early and hard with control – hand hoeing between the seedlings – early on.



TerraCottem also allows them to side-step using compost on the beds for nutrients, though they find they need to top up the soil conditioner every now and then given some is lost each season when the old plants are pulled from the beds. And then there is the reduction in the water bill – they use recycled water but it comes at a price – thanks to the boosted capacity of the treated soil to hold water.

So what is involved in planting a typical bed? The old plants are removed, the surface is groomed, and a top up dose of soil conditioner is rotary hoed in to 10cm (these are shallow rooted plants after all). It takes two people around three hours to prepare the fountain bed. They then don their knees pads, pull out a sheet of 1 x 2m sheet of ply (to disperse their weight over the bed's dreamily friable soil), and spend another two hours as they set out hundreds of plants in that classic diamond-shaped grid that ensures each plant will quickly grow to hide the soil. Petunias, marigolds, amaranthus, cleome, tulips, and sometimes vegetable displays of kale, strawberries, basil and roquet: all have been planted and the seedlings are sourced locally from the institution that is Purtils.

The result is wonderful and the comments of appreciation are heard by staff constantly. "I enjoy seeing the result. Seeing people sitting around and enjoying it. It's very rewarding to help make a space that makes you feel good to walk into."

*It's produced by a team of experts, painstakingly preparing the beds before setting out bulbs and or seedlings twice each year.*



# 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®**