



Nursery & Garden Industry  
Australia

## Feature

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# Growing media tailor-made for production nurseries

There's been a revolution going on in Australian nurseries. No longer are plants grown in soil dug up from the back paddock, but in complex formulas that often these days don't even contain soil.

Understanding the needs of different plants and the impact of local conditions, and investing in quality growing media to suit, is a key focus of modern, successful nurseries.

Van Schaik's Bio Gro has been part of the journey with growers, celebrating 40 years in business and now one of Australia's largest manufacturers and suppliers of growing media and landscape products with over 100 employees across five operational sites.

Bio Gro Technical and Business Development Manager, Phil Nagle, says a lot of research and development has gone into today's range of products.

"There's pretty much something for everyone out there, with the plants of today supported by growing media that responds to water, nutrition and air space requirements, tailor-made for specific climatic regions," Mr Nagle said.



*Image supplied by Bio Gro*

"While it's the grower that ultimately grows the plants, using growing media formulated correctly will remove some of the effort required and let growers focus on other areas of management, while increasing the quality of the end product."

Innovation has been at the forefront of growing media in Australia, dating back to the 1940s when containers consisted of composted organic manures, sand, soil and peat in various ratios.

In the 1970s, scientists from CSIRO joined forces with key industry pioneers, who started experimenting with different container types and mediums to boost plant performance.

During this time the founder of Bio Gro, Hans Van Schaik, began collecting pine bark from local mills and testing varying amounts in different containers. Today, these residuals are important elements of growing media.



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Manufacturers have continued to raise the bar in quality by adopting nursery accreditation programs like Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme, Australia (NIASA) and EcoHort. Having completed both, Bio Gro recently became BioSecure HACCP certified as a way of further improving their risk management and streamlining interstate trade.

Mr Nagle says public and private investment in research remains a key enabler of innovation in the industry, with that value being delivered back to growers.

“Australian nurseries produce a diverse range of species, many of which can be very expensive to produce from propagation to sale.



*Image supplied by Bio Gro*

“Our business model is based on principles of continuous improvement - finding smarter, more sustainable ways to develop growing media for nurseries, and providing growing media that’s more tailor made for particular plants and nurseries than ever before

“This is where technology and continued investment in cutting-edge research comes in, testing new products, and working with external sources for verification, so as to ensure everything produced is safe and fit for purpose.”

“These days, the industry is fortunate enough to have unprecedented access to reliable data that provides the insights to measure success. This in turn can deliver greater precision on crop cycles and crop rotations at the grower level.”

Growing media is vital to the success of greenlife. Growers are encouraged to request their growing media meets specifications and fits within tolerances that serve their specific needs.

At the very least, they should be aware of the minimum standards of the Australian Standard for Potting Mixes and the requirements of their plants, infrastructure and management.

Regular testing should be carried out on air-filled porosity, total water holding capacity, wettability, pH, electrical conductivity and toxicity.

\*\*\*\*ENDS\*\*\*\*

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