

Water problem solved by science

Birnam Nursery, Western Australia

Old timers in the nursery industry can remember when growing plants successfully was based on intuition and experience, with the idea of treating growing as a science still a long way off.

Still, many nurserymen managed to produce high quality product. Such a man was Bob Bentley, who established his nursery in Western Australia in the late seventies, and quickly earned a reputation for growing the best Azaleas in the business. Bob was a fan of Scotts Osmocote and the nursery still uses it to this day. Bob sadly passed away in June 2005, leaving Birnam Nursery to live on and thrive in the hands of his son, Terry Bentley, and son-in-law, Det Klatt.

By the mid 1980s, Birnam Nursery was producing 50,000 Azaleas annually for the retail market and the production peaked even further, hitting production highs in the mid 1990s. The future was looking rosy, and with the urban sprawl beginning to close in the nursery on all sides, Det and Terry decided to move to a new location.

New site, new problem

Unfortunately, the new site had a water source that was unlike what they had known in the old site. This meant that Det and Terry were required to alter the water pH and formulate a new soil mix to make the most out of the new water source. Once making the necessary water amendments it was then time to ask Scotts for technical advice.

Here's where the science of growing comes into play. After trials and research, Scotts Technical Director, Greg Neighbour, organized a plant nutrient program that worked with the new water to assist Birnams in producing the quality stock

they are renowned for (see panel below for details).

In particular, it was Greg's work with Birnam's Cyclamen crops that stood out, resulting in the production of a product of very high standard.

The old days may be remembered fondly by nurseryman, but you can't beat a little modern science to help the new school keep the show on the road.



Now just add water

The Birnam Nursery nutrient program devised by Scotts was based on a detailed understanding of three components:

- Water quality
- New growing environment
- Potting media

It was clear that there were significant limitations to quality plant production due to the irrigation water having a high alkalinity coupled with high salinity. These limiting factors were overcome by Birnams modifying the nutrient inclusions in the potting mix as well as adding acid to neutralise alkalinity. An Osmocote program was then formulated to match the plant needs in the new growing environment for the life of the crop, thus extending the shelf life of the crop.