

The dream of a perfect nursery

Dreamtime Nursery, South Gippsland Victoria

It has taken Philip Wratten five years to perfect what he needs – a perfect nursery.

Philip Wratten is standing among rows of potted eucalypts, looking admiringly over his Dreamtime Nursery. "It took three years to plan and two years to build. And I think we've got this exactly right." He wanted the perfect nursery, and today through his efforts and vision Dreamtime has taken the science of growing to a completely new level.

Dreamtime began in 1989 as a wholesale/retail operation. However, it wasn't until 2001, when Philip relocated the operation to Heath Hill in South Gippsland, Victoria, that he was able to fully combine technology, research and science in a wholesale nursery operation.

Dreamtime is impressive in every aspect of size, production, science and water management. The nursery spans 112,000 square metres – about 20 acres – and is surrounded by 6 kilometres of rabbit proof fencing. A central computer, 65,000 metres of watering system and 160 valves control the irrigation.

Dreamtime produces 60,000 plants each year, with a capacity of up to 75,000, specifically for streetscapes and parkland planting. Up to 4800 pots are day can pass through the dibbling process, where Osmocote Exact is added to the potting media in exactly the right amount, and the plant seed is placed in exactly the centre of the pot.

The irrigation system is as high-tech as you'll find anywhere in the world. ECH2O probes measure the dielectric constant of the potting mix of every plant to find the water content. Hourly readings are recorded using a telemetry radio logging system and monitoring software.

Meanwhile, data on wind speed, solar radiation and humidity are collected by Dreamtime's own automatic weather station and a virtual sensor calculates evapotranspiration (ET). In addition, information is collected from a rain gauge and fed into the system. With all this data, the irrigation system computer is able to set exact water requirement parameters. The result from this massive data in-feed is that every individual plant across the nursery receives the exact water it needs.

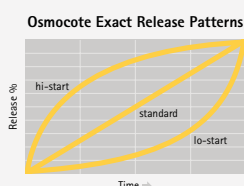


Phil Wratten takes in Dreamtime

The difference between Osmocote Exact Hi-Start, Lo-Start and Standard

The two key factors that influence which Osmocote to apply are the type of crop and the temperature at the time of potting. The granule coating of Osmocote Exact controls the release of nutrients according to soil temperature. More nutrients are released during warmer weather.

In seasonal terms, Osmocote Exact Lo-Start is recommended for summer. Osmocote Exact Standard is formulated for autumn and spring for an even release. Osmocote Exact Hi-Start is for use during winter and early spring. Different crops require different nutrient release. For example, conifers prefer a relatively low release of nutrients during the first stage of cultivation, gradually increasing in the course of time. Osmocote Exact Lo-Start is recommended.



Some plant groups, such as evergreens, benefit from an even release of nutrient throughout the whole season. Osmocote Exact Standard is recommended.

Fast growing plants, such as deciduous shrubs, need more nutrition at the start to achieve optimal growth. Osmocote Exact Hi-Start is recommended.

Irrigation comes from the nursery's 50 megalitre storehouse of water. Dreamtime's catchment and runoff management system is so exact that no nursery water is leached off-site. A specifically designed chlorination process kills pathogens while treating water on the flow and causing no harm to plants. This clean water is reused over and over. So successful is this operation that Dreamtime was a finalist in the 2003 Save Water Awards.

When it comes to fertilising, Philip believes that if you are shirking on the amount you add to pots, you're fooling yourself with a false economy. Some years ago he found he was using less than the right amount of fertiliser – not surprisingly, he was getting reduced longevity from his fertiliser – resulting in underfeeding of his plants towards the end of the crop cycle.

This time around, you can't sway Philip from the value of Osmocote Exact. "Scotts Osmocote Exact meets all our requirements and growing conditions. We add it exactly down to the gram and the release of nutrients is tailored to give us optimal growth patterns.

"We use either Hi-Start, Lo-Start and Standard Osmocote Exact depending on crop or season. "I want exactness. I've got exact watering systems, exact weather monitoring systems, even exact windbreaks erected around the place. I wouldn't go back to a standard product because the results speak for themselves."

The Dreamtime product is a healthy plant, not forced grown, free of disease, nutritionally balanced and able to adapt to its new environment faster. Is this the perfect nursery? Next time you're passing Dreamtime in Heath Hill, drop by and see for yourself. Don't be surprised if Phil says 'EXACT' a lot in the chat. It's in his nature and his business.



4800 pots per day, fertilised and potted exactly



Growing success