

Taking care of business

Geranium Cottage Nursery, NSW

As Australia's largest grower dealing exclusively with pelargoniums, Gary Dale of Geranium Cottage has spent twenty-five years refining his growing techniques to simultaneously improve plant quality and lift volume of production – without increasing costs. The key? "Better science, more advanced chemicals," says Gary.

Pelargonium is a genus comprising around two hundred species of plants that, in various parts of the world, are commonly known as geraniums. The extensive range of pelargoniums at Geranium Cottage is continuously being updated as new varieties are brought in from Europe.

Geranium Cottage pelargoniums are sold mainly through Bunnings as well as wholesalers in New South Wales and Gary's own retail outlet. As such, the need to balance volume and margin is an ever-present challenge. "To mass produce successfully it's no longer acceptable to see a third of your plants get chucked out," says Gary. "Ninety-nine percent have got to be saleable."

Growing the necessary volume of high quality pelargoniums for large scale retailers can be extremely difficult. Gary explains that cuttings are highly susceptible to fungus and rot, especially in Sydney's humid climate. "Until Scotts introduced Crown insecticide it was pretty frustrating. It was a case of 'Can we keep growing this stock?'"

How does he manage to improve the yield from cuttings without an increase in expenditure? "You can only do that through better science, cleaner propagation and the elimination of pests and diseases. A lot of growers use plugs – but they're so expensive. You can't mass produce unless you can get cuttings in trays. Getting that right was a breakthrough in supplying larger volumes. This method of propagation allowed us to dial up the numbers – without increasing cost."



"The trick is finding something that will suppress pathogens without harming plant tissues. You have to be able to control soil borne and water borne diseases without destroying the plant. The beauty of Crown is that it works, and it doesn't even mark the flowers. You can spray in the heat of the day and you're not going to get any burning with it."

Diseases like pythium as well as white flies, gnats, caterpillars and other pests are no match for Scotts Crown. "White fly is a significant carrier of diseases, but Crown knocks out the nymphs as well as the adult flies – it's a two stage kill and it lasts a lot longer. And Crown is very effective on mealy bugs and aphids – I haven't seen any aphids since I started using it."

Good things come in small packages, too

The positive reaction to the new 200mL Crown bottle is exceeding all expectations. But to Scotts NSW Regional Sales Manager, Robert Megier, it comes as no surprise. "Until now," he explains, "Crown has only been available in a one-litre pack, and with a low rate of use – 2mL in every 10 litres – smaller nurseries could take several years to finish the pack. Now they can have the same concentration and effectiveness, but in a more convenient size for them."

And that means everyone's happy – except the pests!

“Crown is safer in the Greenhouse environment too, with shorter re-entry periods for my staff after spraying which is good from a WorkCover point of view. We spray less frequently now, and in lower doses. That’s why Scotts Crown insecticide is so good, because of its ability to practically eliminate sap-sucking insects with a couple of sprays in a season. It works for long, long periods – up to eight weeks between spraying. It’s very impressive.”

So what advice would Gary give to other growers? “Scotts products are really good – particularly Crown, and Procide is good too. Those two are all I need for complete control of insect problems here. Crown is fantastic, a great chemical. I have been raving about it – I don’t mind recommending a good chemical.”

And the results speak for themselves – high quality stock in large volumes at low prices. Like Geranium Cottage pelargoniums, Crown looks good from every angle.

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Growing cuttings in trays without loss was a breakthrough in supplying large volumes

A retail face for the wholesale brand

Geranium Cottage Nursery has recently taken full advantage of their picturesque environs in Middle Dural, Sydney, by establishing a retail nursery and café.

Built around the original Geranium Cottage, located fifteen minutes away from the wholesale nursery, customers experience the Geranium Cottage brand through a combination of retail outlet, café and gift shop.

The concept has proven popular with coach tour operators en route to the Blue Mountains, known for its majestic private gardens and the Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens.

Providing an enjoyable retail experience for their guests complements and supports the wholesale function of the Geranium Cottage Nursery. Gary comments on the benefits; “Our reputation’s growing – it’s a nice way to introduce retail customers to our beautiful plants and gives that extra personality to the Geranium Cottage brand.”



Gary Daly delivers Pelargoniums grown at the Geranium Cottage Wholesale Nursery to his retail outlet for sale to the public.



Pelargoniums are available in ever increasing varieties.



Growing success