

# A little ingenuity goes a long way

Hayes Wholesale Nurseries, NZ A

**How do you increase margins in a tight nursery market if you can't raise prices? Barry Hayes of Hayes Wholesale Nurseries (NZ) believes you apply a little ingenuity to increase productivity and efficiency.**

Barry and his wife Lisa established Hayes Wholesale Nurseries in 1984, specializing in Fuchsias, Pelargoniums and Geraniums. Hayes is now New Zealand's biggest Fuchsia grower, with 150 varieties under their own custom-made Hayes Fuchsia label. The nursery covers around six acres with 4000m<sup>2</sup> under heated glasshouses and 1500m<sup>2</sup> in polycarb houses.

From day one Barry set the ground rules for the nursery's operation, and that was to run it as efficiently as possible and look to innovation wherever possible. "Innovation," says Barry. "Some people think about it, others just do it." We saw the evidence of Barry's innovative approach first hand on the day we spoke to him for this article. He was applying the finishing touches to a new glasshouse in preparation for the installation of 1000m<sup>2</sup> of rolling benches.

Rolling benches offer some great benefits for both the plants and the operator. They make the job easier on the back with less bending and stretching to reach the plants, and plant maintenance becomes a quicker job. So plants are being maintained more regularly and they look better at sale time. Barry sourced the benches from the United States to get exactly what he wanted.

## Innovation is where you find it

This is not the first time Barry has gone global in the pursuit of the right tools for the job. In early 2001 Barry enquired about the Ellegaard system (made in Denmark), which produces sausage-like plugs that go into pre-spaced plug trays or pots. The system dispenses with the traditional process of filling up trays and then trying to pry plants out of cells later on. The Ellegaard system plugs can be cut to any length and are wrapped in a biodegradable material.

Barry purchased the Ellegaard system, the only one of its kind in New Zealand, and is now about to launch a new division of his business, Biopots New Zealand Ltd, after successful trials of some 10,000 plugs in some of New Zealand's biggest nurseries. Barry uses Scotts Osmocote Mini 3-4 month and Hydraflo 2 wetting agent in all plugs that go to market.

In productivity terms, the system has saved Barry and his team between 10 and 14 days on the old hand potting method.



Left: Evident health in plug plants using Osmocote Mini 3-4month



Right: Barry has the Ellegaard system making 40-50mm long plugs in 25 or 40mm diameter

Additionally, within the nursery, by using Osmocote Exact Hi K (10+4.8+15+TE) 5-6 month in his 1.5 litre pots, he has found that the root ball is twice as big after only 6 days with the combination of Osmocote Exact and the Ellegaard system.

Maintaining the global theme, Hayes Wholesale Nurseries is the NZ agent for PAC Geraniums. Barry took the opportunity to approach the German PAC Geranium grower when the Berlin Wall came down and became the exclusive providers of PAC Geraniums in NZ.

## It's all in the mind

When asked what he considers to be the main challenge in the industry, Barry was quick to reply. "Holding market share in what almost seems to be a pressured market. 'Big box' stores are putting pressure on nurseries to provide smaller numbers of products, of better quality, at optimum prices.

"We take a lot of pride in being able to provide large volumes of products on time and of great quality. Another major concern is energy costs, whether that be transport costs to market place, or heating costs."

As certain growers know only too well, the price you can charge for your product is set by what retailers are willing to pay. Barry believes the only way to increase profits in the nursery market is to increase productivity and efficiency, thereby widening margins by decreasing unit costs.

Barry has been able to achieve these productivity gains by applying a combination of sound business practices, Scotts products and his ingenuity in developing innovative solutions. As to what lies ahead for this progressive nursery, we'll just have to wait and see what next pops into Barry's mind.