

Does your potting mix pass the test?

Hickmans Nursery, NSW

Many major nurseries make their own potting mix, devising the composition of the mix to suit their particular stock requirements and local environmental conditions. However, even the most competently prepared mix can be improved. The secret is in knowing how.

That's where a soil test can offer some interesting results. Hickmans Nursery was established 28 years ago by Tony Hickman in Taree, NSW. Sadly, Tony passed away this year, but his legacy lives on at Hickmans through his brothers and Rob Ponsonby, who maintains Tony's tradition in demanding optimum results. With that goal in mind, when Robert Megier, Scotts Regional Sales Manager NSW/ACT, offered to conduct a soil test on Hickmans potting mix, Rob agreed. (A soil test is something everyone should do semi-regularly even if purchasing mix from a potting soil manufacturer.)

The results of the soil test showed that the mix was low in iron. After consultation with Robert Megier, Rob increased the iron in the mix and the rate and longevity of Osmocote. This not only improved the quality of the stock, it also meant they didn't have to topdress, saving not only time but also money.

"The great thing about the soil test," said Rob, "was that Robert Megier came in, picked up a sample and faxed back the results of the test. It was all done for us. We made the necessary adjustments that prior to the soil test we didn't know were necessary."

Hickmans Nursery's biggest product line is Shefflera 'Amate' (Umbrella Tree), along with Buxus and Ficus. The biggest challenges facing the business, in Rob's view, are the overall economic climate and the drought. Rob can't do a lot about the economic climate but he is making positive moves to combat the dry conditions with drainage improvements and recycling more water where he can.

"We've had fantastic results with Scotts Hydraflo 2," said Rob. "The water holding capacity is significantly greater and the plants are not drying out or wilting."

"When we can make things run more efficiently in the nursery it is always a plus."



A small tweak to Hickmans potting mix improved the plants' overall quality.