

Plugging a gap

AUSTRALIAN production nurseries are adept at making use of the latest European technology, and one of the most popular arrivals in recent years has been a Danish phenomenon known as the Ellepot.

Distributed in Australia by **Transplant Systems Pty Ltd** of Berwick, near Melbourne, the Ellepot is a peat-based plug for use in propagating material such as vegetables, ornamental trees and shrubs, perennials, and pot, bedding and forestry plants.

The plugs are made of fresh peat from Kekkila Oji, Finland, with the optional addition of perlite or vermiculite. "This retains the unique properties of sphagnum cells, being rich in beneficial micro activity," Transplant Systems' Mike Walker says.

"Sphagnum cells are thin-walled, with large cavities. They're designed to absorb and transport water.

"The walls of the plugs are built up in rings, spirals or plates to prevent them collapsing if they dry out so that even after the cells have become peat they can still carry and absorb water. As this evaporates, they fill with air; it's easy to understand what this supply of oxygen and water means to plants.

"Peat moss can also absorb, store and release large amounts of nutrients and does not need composting," Walker says.

"The peat is kept airy and supportive of the developing root structure by a patented production process using special machines to create the cell, which is then wrapped in a biodegradable fibre."

Walker says the system "encourages early root growth, allowing established plants to be easily graded and lifted as required".

"Once roots have extended through the cell volume, the shape and firmness of the cell makes it suitable for easy transplanting – in particular, with an automatic plug transplanter. Roots can penetrate the non-woven, paper wrap easily with no root curl and no wasted media."

Transplant Systems can supply Ellepots



As the plants grow, roots can penetrate the biodegradable wrap of the Ellepot.

in diameters of between 10 millimetres and 120mm and at various heights, and the nutritive value and pH of the medium can be adjusted on request. Trays of pre-dipped pots can be supplied to suit individual growers' specifications, fit standard growing benches and can be used with all irrigation systems.

Once growers have familiarised themselves with using the Ellepot, the next step is installing their own manufacturing machines on-site, Walker says.

Ellegaard AS was established in 1989 in Esbjerg, Denmark. Three years later its vacuum substrate-pot machine went on show at the Plantec horticultural fair in Frankfurt, Germany, where overwhelming interest encouraged Ella and Øjvind Ellegaard to develop a semi-automatic version.

Today the company holds patents in 35 countries and continues to refine its range of products.

The Ellepot is not the only thing keeping the Transplant Systems team busy at present. According to Walker, staff is also rolling out a new system for handling traditional plastic pots once they have left the potting machine. Made by **Demtec** in Belgium, the Buffer Table System allows as many as 900 pots at a time, depending on size, to be picked up and moved in a single sweep.



At Payneham Plant Wholesalers in South Australia, pots are moved in bulk following the installation of a Buffer Table System.

"In brief, the pots come off the potting machine and plants are placed in them as usual, then they are counted onto a pusher robot that pushes them onto a conveyor two metres or more wide by six metres long. This is known as the 'buffer table', hence the term for the system.

"Accumulation pots like this in a condensed area allows them to be picked up by a forklift or tractor with a special comb-fork attachment on the front. These pots can then be placed directly down onto the nursery bed for growing on.

"One of the great limiting factors of production is the speed at which pots can be taken away and put down.

"This has led to this innovative method of handling, which has really taken off in Europe due to the increased efficiencies achieved."

Walker says the system also allows for pots to be watered as they are placed onto the buffer table.

Australia's first Buffer Table System was installed at Gerard White and Kathryn Errey's Payneham Plant Wholesalers at Willunga, near Adelaide, late last year.

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tions by *Gardening Australia's* Jerry Coleby-Williams and Andrew O'Sullivan and permaculture expert Peter Rutherford.

The Australia/New Zealand Organic Wine Show will run concurrently.

Contact Smeaton Hackett Events, phone: (02) 9451 4747; email: <mary@shevents.com.au>; web: <www.organicexpo.com.au>.

Pruning demo

XERISCAPE Garden at the **Canberra Institute of Technology** and

Horticulture School in Weston will be the venue for a special pruning demonstration hosted by the **Horticultural Society of Canberra** in July.

Admission will be free of charge, with the session to run from 10.30am until 12.30pm on July 15.

Society president Ron Gray, David Young and Bayne Geikie will demonstrate techniques.

Contact Ron Gray, phone: (02) 6251 1114.

Gloves off

THEY'RE right there on the TV screen every week, and now the Ironclad work gloves worn by the *Backyard Blitz* team are making their retail debut.

Designed for the "professional landscaper and man about the house, err ... garden", the heavy utility model sported by team members including Jamie Durie, Scott Cam and Nigel Ruck is form-fitting and machine-washable, with abrasive-resistant Duraclad on the palms and fingers.

A smaller female version – "designed by