

Nurseries setting Standards

Edinburgh Parks Nursery - new direction takes away the risk of no stock in landscaping

By Grant Dalwood: Chief Executive & Development Officer - NGISA

High profile South Australian landscaping company LCS Landscapes, winner of many Landscape Association of SA Awards of Excellence over the years, has been consistently frustrated over a lack of availability of provenance species for its landscape, revegetation and maintenance projects.

While major South Australian production nurseries have traditionally grown a broader range of general landscape plants to satisfy the market, business owner Roger Wood made an important decision to establish his own nursery to meet their needs, based on a number of factors.

Firstly, the availability of suitable land in the vicinity of much of their maintenance work and future developments and, secondly, quality staff were already on the payroll and willing to commit long term to develop the site in a way that would see it both profitable and sustainable.

With a background in natural resource management and revegetation, staff

member Alison Annells took on the responsibility at the coal face. Alison, who already had the responsibility of managing the planting component of projects within the landscape business for more than 10 years, decided to approach the Nursery & Garden Industry South Australia (NGISA) Development Officer, Grant Dalwood, for advice in setting up the new project.

Alison was aware of the Nursery Industry Association South Australia (NIASA) program from dealing with other NIASA accredited businesses such as Wholesale Plants & Products and Native Plant Wholesalers, and was convinced that their success was in part attributed to the best management practices portrayed in the Farm Management System (FMS) program.

On consulting with the NGISA and before actually joining the association as a member (they have been members of Landscape Association of South Australia [LASA] for many years) LCS created a separate business entity to be called Edinburgh Parks Nursery. This was a strategic move to ensure that the nursery cost centre under the LCS umbrella could be more easily held to account.

Alison then purchased a copy of the NIASA BMP (Best Management Practice) manual from NGISA and had preliminary discussions with Grant Dalwood. From there, plans were drawn up to create an entity that could be expanded if the need arose and, most importantly, would operate under the best management practices of NIASA, utilising water



Various coverings on tunnels and a closer look at the sprinkler system

recycling strategies that were sustainable and cost effective.

The Edinburgh Parks site is dead pan flat and is located about 30 kilometres north of Adelaide in a low rainfall developing industrial area close to Elizabeth. The virgin surface is clay and recycled treatment water, as well as mains, were both available at the gate.

First construction was a large shed to house all future nursery requirements as well as a yard for landscaping and landscape maintenance equipment. It was important to maintain hygiene protocols so that propagation and landscape roles could easily be separated.

During the design and construction phase of the nursery, space was needed for holding stock for existing work in progress and this added to the logistics problems for the busy site.

The design principles were centred on water catchment and recycling on the site, as Adelaide is renowned for very high mains water prices. Although rainfall is erratic, it is possible, with clean and efficient catchment, to maintain good stocks of pure water to be used mainly in the propagation process. This was achieved by installing two 22,500 litre tanks for rainwater catchment, two 50,050 litre tanks for treated recycled water above ground, and 22,730 litres underground, fed by an extensive system of laser levelled drains for subsurface water catchment on the initial 2,475square metre growing area.

A 'Freshwater' system for chlorination monitoring and injection was installed inline. As is usual, some tweaking was required at start up to ensure required levels with the shandying of recycled and treatment water, together with the required pumping systems to ensure that 'event' rainfall could be trapped and excess removed from the growing areas to the street drainage system when required.

Overhead sprinklers with a combination of Hunter PGP's and wobbler heads are being used to perform comfortably within required tolerances, making allowances for the often squally winds in the area, even though the growing area is currently protected on three sides.

Drainage sumps which are strategically located around the growing area are delineated by larger rocks which allow unrestricted tractor usage whilst allowing easy access for storm water and maintenance.



Poly tunnels and well grown stock neatly set out in job lots



Showing a high degree of hygiene as well as neat layout to assist with movement



Bulka bags and machinery neatly laid out to separate storage from production



Potting and stainless steel propagation bench with floor mats for work efficiency

The potting on and propagation areas were designed with a floor trap for easy cleaning. Wheeled benches were designed and constructed for versatility, as future use of the shed saw no advantage in tying down any part of the small production process.

One problem that often develops with limited working spaces is the difficulty in transferring potting media delivered in two cubic metre bulka bags onto benches – a process that is often performed manually.

Another minor problem developed when trying to find a suitable watering place in the otherwise spotless site. Alison maintains that the extremely low use of chemicals, especially in weed control, is a point of constant reminder for her staff. The high level of water catchment on the site is jeopardised if chemicals are applied to the porous nursery surface, so half-hour hand weeding is part of the daily work routine for everyone that also provides opportunity for monitoring of outbreaks of other pests and disease.

Just outside the potting area is a permanent pot washing area, necessary due to the high number of tubes, small pots and trays that are reused within the 'grow your own – plant out' process that epitomises much of the provenance revegetation process.

Edinburgh Parks Nursery has also established some areas for stock beds, mainly designated for the hard-to-find species that an avid collector like Alison has compiled. These plants she protects as if they were her own siblings.



Sprinkler layout

A mainstay of the propagation process on site was the erection of two poly tunnels made by Fenlows of Mt Barker. Fenlows tunnels are always well constructed, with roll-up side vents and modified by the installation of an above-door vent at either end to increase circulation during the very hot summers. A mixture of overhead misters and general purpose sprinklers ensure water is applied correctly.

Now two years on, Alison and the team see no great need to adopt any changes to the well-researched and constructed facility. In fact it is now time to pay back the investment and to maintain standards and scope so they become less reliant on others and become a more cost-effective business.



A view of outdoor storage along with the recycling tanks discretely located on one side