



Greenlife Industry Australia

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Success starts with a clean source for Eyles Citrus

CLEAN and virus-free mother stock should be at the top of the priority list in nursery production to ensure propagation and plant material has the greatest chance of success and to minimise the spread of disease.

That's according to one of Australia's leading citrus growers, Gary Eyles, who together with his wife Jan operates a production nursery on a 10-hectare site at Kenthurst, located on the outskirts of Sydney, New South Wales.

A third-generation citrus producer for the trade, wholesale and commercial markets, the business will celebrate its 100th anniversary this year. It employs around 20 full time staff and grows more than 60 citrus varieties.

Eyles Citrus has long demonstrated a commitment to stock quality and standards across their entire production operation, placing a focus on enhancing plant nutrition and pest management.

This commitment to industry best-practice was formalised in 1999, when the business gained accreditation into the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA), the renowned national best management practice program for production nurseries.

With citrus production facing challenges from pests and disease, climate volatility, new export markets and shifting consumer trends, Gary says excellent plant health is the backbone of his business.

"Our mission is to be known for quality plants. It underpins everything we do here at Eyles," Gary said.

"To achieve this, plant health has to be number one. If we cannot maintain freedom from diseases, we will lose our market share, both domestically and internationally.

"I've seen instances abroad where citrus crops are solely produced in insect-proof facilities, a costly and devastating consequence of exotic pests, diseases and weeds.

"When it comes to keeping diseases like Citrus Canker, Xylella and the Asian Citrus Psyllid out of Australia, we must focus on preparedness and ensure best practice at individual sites and across industry."

For Gary, this means operating under the highest standards and sourcing most of his bud stock and seeds through the scientifically backed Auscitrus virus-indexing program.

"If you're starting from a clean source, then you're going to multiply clean stock," Gary said.

"When you've got a choice to source clean stock, it's an easy one. Auscitrus is an excellent scheme and provides growers with reassurance that stock has undergone the rigorous testing to be classified as virus-free."

Manager of Auscitrus Tim Herrmann says the national not-for-profit industry association comprising of citrus and nursery growers, has been operating since 1928 and was established by a group of NSW nursery growers who sought superior budwood to improve their orchard quality.

"Our trees are grown to the highest standards and undergo complex testing by the NSW Department of Primary Industries for about a dozen different viruses and viroids," Tim said.

"Once the tree has been tested and approved, it is retained in our repository where we multiply and test that stock again every 3-5 years."

Considered an 'insurance policy' for growers, the best practice program now sells up to 1000 kilograms of seed and up to a million buds per year, across dozens of leading citrus varieties.

"Almost 80 per cent of commercial orchardists ask production nurseries to use budwood from the scheme, and we estimate 60 to 70 per cent from wholesale nurseries use the tested material," Tim said.



Eyles Citrus, located on the outskirts of Sydney, New South Wales.

Hort Innovation
Strategic levy investment

NURSERY FUND

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au



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Pictured: Gary Eyles from Eyles Citrus.

Currently, Eyles Citrus sources around 3,000 – 3,500 of virus-indexed buds from Auscitrus on a weekly basis, a process that started with Gary’s grandfather back when the program began in 1928.

“At the end of the day, virus-indexing programs are proven to be the most efficient way to get an industry producing clean material,” Gary said.

“As someone about to pass the business baton onto the next generation, it’s important that we as an industry take responsibility on this issue. We can’t leave it to someone else. We have to keep biosecurity front of mind.”

For more information on improving crop hygiene in your production nursery, please refer to the NIASA manual (seventh edition) available [here](#) or www.nurseryproductionfms.com.au

For more information, please contact Greenlife Industry Australia at: info@greenlifeindustry.com.au or on 02 8861 5100.

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“It comes down to education. The reason we have a clean industry is that the majority of people are using clean material. It’s critical we don’t take that for granted, and we must continue to educate about the importance of tested material.”

Gary believes sourcing virus-indexed stock and adhering to NIASA guidelines is vital for the success of his business.

Working to improve hygienic plant propagation and enhancing plant protection, provides peace of mind that a business is supplying clean, high quality stock to customers.

“The real value of virus indexed stock shows when it leaves the nursery and is planted into the landscape or orchard. Often a sick tree won’t express symptoms in the nursery, but poor performance will show in 3-5 years’ time,” Gary said.

“Whether it be off fruit or bud unions that have broken down, the bottom line is that if trees aren’t performing, a customer won’t come back.

“Our customers come back for trees that are vigorous and provide an economic return, and we’re proud to say that many of our customers have been with us for a very long time.”