

NURSERY PAPERS

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EcoHort™ - the environmental management system for Australian nursery production

Nursery & Garden Industry Australia (NGIA) in partnership with Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) have developed a set of guidelines that provide a systematic approach for production nurseries to assess their environmental and natural resource management responsibilities.

EcoHort™ is the industry specific set of guidelines or Environmental Management System (EMS). In this month's nursery paper, Queensland Industry Development Manager John McDonald discusses the importance of EcoHort for guiding businesses in our industry in sustainable management practices. The paper also explains how EcoHort™ assists growers in assessing their current and future environmental and natural resource impacts while continuing to promote profitability.



EcoHort™ - the environmental management system for Australian nursery production

What is EcoHort™?

EcoHort™ is a method by which a grower can demonstrate to industry, government and the community their sound environmental and natural resource stewardship. Adopting the process of EcoHort™ will allow you to show that your business:

1. Has utilised a recognised system for assessing likely environmental and natural resource impacts, and
2. Is managing these impacts in a responsible and sustainable manner.

For businesses that have invested time and money into systems and technology that enhance environmental and natural resource outcomes, EcoHort offers a practical means of gaining recognition for these efforts.



Redlands Nursery Qld - an example of efficient sprinkler selection and design.

Rising to the environmental challenge

Nursery production is a highly diverse industry. It services a broader horticultural sector, including ornamental retail, landscaping, interiorscaping, forestry, re-vegetation, cut flower and fruit and vegetable producers. The diversification of customers has placed growers in our industry in a range of locations across Australia, including urban, peri-urban, regional and rural.

The nursery and garden industry is confronted by a multitude of environmental and natural resource impediments as a result of this spread. From land use restrictions and urban encroachment to government legislation, heightened community expectations and water access, availability and utilisation requirements, the range of constraining factors can at times seem overwhelming.

It is therefore important that the nursery and garden industry has developed its own Environmental Management System, EcoHort™. The EcoHort™ guidelines ensure that the various aspects of nursery

production are addressed in a way that maximises business sustainability and profitability whilst considering the likely environmental impact(s).

EcoHort™ has drawn together a substantial amount of information highlighting best management practice in nursery production. Amassed over a number of years through the industry's R&D program, many of these projects offer guidance to growers on how to improve business outcomes while proactively addressing environmental and natural resource responsibilities.

EcoHort™ is a significant step forward for industry because it:

- Is the vehicle from which businesses can gain recognition for the advances and uptake of industry best management practice, and
- Allows the industry to show that it is demonstrating due diligence under the label of environmental and natural resource management.



Narromine Transplants NSW - good irrigation practice produces uniform crop growth.

Improve business outcomes while proactively addressing environmental and natural resource responsibilities

Environmental Management Systems

An Environmental Management System (EMS) is a voluntary program based on identified environmental and natural resource impacts. It can be used to address the many environmental and natural resource issues confronting businesses today.

More specifically, an EMS is a useful tool to help businesses systematically implement change across the production system. This is because change introduced through an EMS is based on an Action Plan which identifies the priority of risk(s) according to industry best management practice.

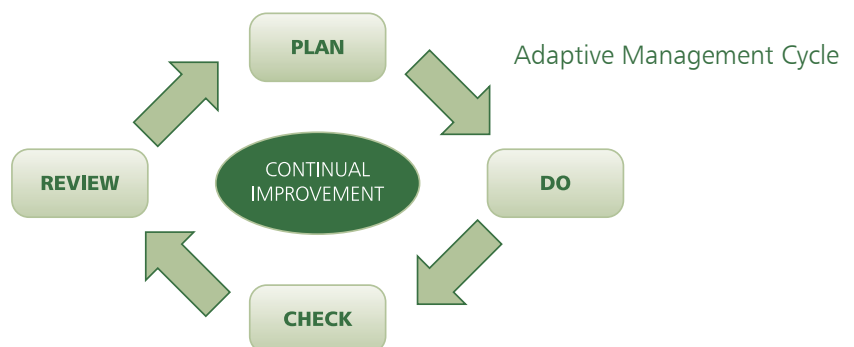
EMS also offers businesses 'continuous improvement', that is, a risk assessment-based pathway to continuously improve their management systems. It encourages a business to 'plan, do, check and review' at regular intervals and across all aspects of the production cycle.

The 'plan, do, check, review' process is a basic management tool embedded in any credible EMS. It encourages a continuous cycle of improvement through:

- Good planning and assessment
- Implementing actions or change
- Effective monitoring and recording, and
- Regular reviewing or auditing.

The monitoring results generated by this process are an essential part of the adaptive management cycle. They are not only used to review and update plans, but importantly, also provide a degree of proof that your business is addressing the environmental and natural resource issues at hand.

Significantly, an EMS is recognised by all levels of government, including national, state and local.



Profitability and sustainability go hand in hand

A key component of an EMS is that it guides businesses to address current and potential adverse impacts on the environment in a sustainable way while maintaining or improving business profitability. It recognises that good production techniques are also beneficial to the wider environment in areas such as:

- efficient irrigation
- nutrient management
- energy efficient equipment
- waste minimisation
- pest & weed management, and
- recycling of waste products.

An EMS asks businesses to look at internal processes and systems and technology use. It also looks outside the property boundary and at the likely adverse impacts the business could deliver. In other words, an EMS asks the question, 'What are the possible adverse outputs delivered downstream from the business that could impact on the environmental value of the immediate surroundings and on a larger regional scale?' Considerations would include water, odour, noise, biodiversity and the aesthetic value of the community.



Pohlmanns Nursery Qld - recycling irrigation water storage.

The EcoHort™ Fact File

What is EcoHort™?



EcoHort™ is a set of guidelines that have been developed under the principles of an Environmental Management System geared to nursery production in Australia.

It is a voluntary program available to the industry as either:

- A stand alone guide applied to the business as an internal process, or
- A process adopted formally under the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA) with recognised EcoHort™ certification.

Who do the EcoHort Guidelines apply to?

EcoHort™ is relevant to production nurseries growing in containers and in-ground, and growing media manufacturers.

Why is EcoHort™ important?

EcoHort™ supports production nurseries and media manufacturers in implementing good sustainable practice and improving production.

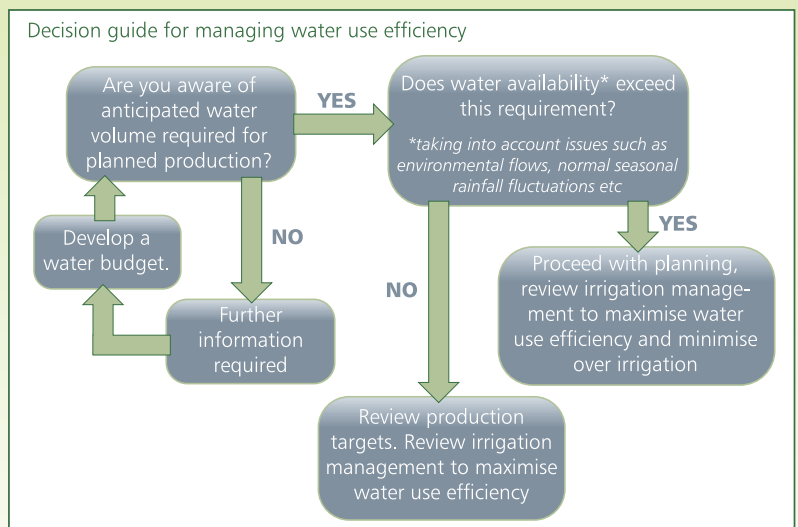
It also helps position the industry to proactively demonstrate its role in maintaining and enhancing the broader landscape in which we live, work and play.

What information will I find in the EcoHort Guidelines?

The EcoHort™ Guidelines provide identification of environmental and natural resource risks, information on managing impacts, risk assessment tools and monitoring and recording templates.

A quality reference section is featured at the end of each chapter that guides growers to relevant information to assist in addressing potential impacts and improving environmental and natural resource management.

The guidelines also offer a simple flow chart (Decision Guide) at the beginning of each chapter that allows a business to briefly review the likely risks associated with their present activities. Based on the outcome of reviewing the Decision Guide, a business may take the opportunity to read that chapter in more detail to investigate the opportunities for improving performance.



A wealth of information for nursery production

EcoHort™ has identified the potential risks that are linked with most processes in nursery production. Along with the Risk Assessment Checklist, EcoHort™ endeavours to make the on-site application of the program straight forward. In some areas, 'target values' have been nominated as a guide for businesses to aim for when improving systems management such as irrigation, nutrient retention and run-off water contamination.

In addition, the guidelines offer a great deal of information for identifying the potential risks associated with performing activities at various stages in the production cycle. These risks are prioritised in the Risk Assessment Checklist according to the likely severity of the impact. This helps growers to stay organised and while targeting the areas that require immediate attention.



Redlands Nursery, Qld - the EcoHort™ guidelines are relevant to both container and in-ground production nurseries.

EcoHort™ addresses:

- Irrigation system design
- Water quality management
- Waste water management & recycling
- Land & soil management
- Site drainage & water storage
- Site biodiversity
- Management of air, noise & odour
- Waste management
- Measuring, monitoring & recording
- Integrated pest management

EcoHort™ assists in:

- Maintaining natural resource access
- Demonstrating environmental due diligence
- Managing environmental risks & impacts
- Demonstrating legislative compliance
- On-site assistance in Action Planning
- Government recognition for compliance
- Implementing best management practice
- Production efficiencies through technology
- Business change management
- Environmental labeling of products

Applying EcoHort™ at a business level should begin with critically assessing the business against the Risk Assessment Checklist. Based on the results of this process, the business should then:

1. Gather further information from both the guidelines and other reference material to obtain a greater understanding of the issues and management principles.
2. Prioritise action areas

3. Develop an action plan that addresses each issue in a sustainable way, particularly if there is a need to invest in implementing change.

Remember, an industry guide such as EcoHort™ cannot incorporate all the various pieces of legislation that may be relevant to individual businesses across Australia. It is imperative that each business investigates all legal responsibilities that may apply based on its respective location.

EcoHort™ has identified the potential risks that are linked with most processes in nursery production

More information

For further information contact your State or Territory Industry Development Officer.

Acknowledgements

This Nursery Paper was written by John McDonald, Industry Development Manager, Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland (NGIQ).