



Proteaflora Nursery, Monbulk, Victoria, is officially Australia's best large production nursery.

Quality control of potting mix is a priority, Proteaflora's David Mathews says. Every batch is tested for levels such as pH and EC, and staff also count fertiliser prills in sample quantities to check that volume is correct.

"It's a very quick, easy way of highlighting to us if there's a problem with the fertiliser levels," Mathews says. "The potting mix is so important to the success of growth that we take a lot of care with it."

The business also uses a range of methods to control pests and diseases.

Staff monitor for telltale signs, and sticky traps are also used. The business records the times of the year and the weather conditions that are associated with pest incursions so preventative action can be taken quickly.

"As soon as those conditions arrive we'll go and spray. We won't wait until we can see the problem; we know the conditions are set up to create a problem," Mathews says.

Two important systems underpin the nursery: the ISO9001 quality management system, adopted in 1996, and the Nursery Industry Accreditation Scheme Australia (NIASA) accreditation.

"Having tight systems is very important in running a good nursery," Mathews says.

The formulation of clear business values – including partnerships, innovation and excellence – has also helped create a cohesive team of staff who work enthusiastically towards a common goal.

The best medium-production nursery was judged to be native seedling producer **Jayfields Nursery**, Wagga Wagga, New South Wales.

In his judging notes, Stephens commented on the business's superior crop hygiene.

"We make sure everything is always kept neat and tidy," Kim Passalacqua says. "We have minimal water use and run-off, so it doesn't get too wet or muddy around the nursery."

All stock is kept off the ground and staff ensure debris, surplus pots and media are quickly cleaned up.

Irrigation is via travelling boom sprays. The business uses groundwater from the property which is deflocked and then sterilised with ultraviolet light.

"The water's delivered precisely to the plants. There is no overlap so we get very little run-off," Passalacqua says.

The Passalacquas read industry magazines and speak to specialists in different fields to keep abreast of technical innovations. They also follow up with customers to gain feedback for continual improvement.

At the six-hectare (15-acre) **Dream-time Wholesale Nursery**, Heath Hill, Victoria, which was named best small-



Dream-time Wholesale Nursery, Heath Hill, Victoria, was named best small production nursery in this year's Australian Garden Industry Awards.

production nursery, Richard Stephens was particularly impressed with the business's well-designed layout.

Dream-time's Philip Wratten designed the site based on considerable nursery experience after spending many years searching for a property with good drainage, good air movement and access to water.

Wide roads give easy access to each bay while about two kilometres of screening hedges protect stock from wind. The plants are generously spaced to allow air movement and light penetration.

To prevent water leaching into adjoining properties and to enable recycling, growing areas are covered with a black plastic membrane which directs run-off water and rain to a rock filter, a settlement pond and then an 80-million-litre dam.

An inch (25 millimetres) of rainfall, Wratten says, enables the business to collect one million litres of water.

Before re-use, water is disinfested with calcium chlorine while irrigation is controlled by a weather station.

Stephens said the business also stood out for its good selection and ongoing inspection of propagation suppliers, high standards of maintenance and technical innovation.

For Stan and Isabel Leach and Debbie Deckys of Alstonville Palms, Alstonville, NSW, the environmental excellence award was recognition for 10 years of implementing environmentally friendly production techniques, particularly those for water use.



Dream-time Wholesale Nursery collects rainwater and run-off in its 80-million-litre dam.