

## Healthy Habitat for Schools

## Fact Sheet 7

### Prepare to plant

Before you start digging, what other preparation is required?

#### Do you have the right resources?

- Tools (gloves, bags, digging equipment, shovel and rakes)
- Mulch
- Fertilisers and water crystals
- Stakes and ties
- Irrigation



#### Soil type and condition

Test your soil to check its pH and nutrient levels. There are pH test kits available at your local nursery. Some plants prefer sandy soils while others may prefer clay.

1. When the soil is moist, pick up a handful and squeeze it tightly in your hand.
2. Try to pinch the soil into a ribbon.
  - If the soil forms a ribbon up to 5cm long = clay soil.
  - If the soil forms a ribbon only 2.5cm long = loam soil.
  - If the soil falls apart easily and won't make a ribbon = sandy soil.

More information can be found on soil types on fact sheet 8.



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## What is the drainage like in your patch?

Dig a hole and fill it with 10cm of water. Return in two hours and if the water is gone, there is good drainage. If not, you will need to consider which plant species will most suitable and your irrigation methods.

Fertilise native plants with a slow release native fertiliser, treated with a water retention polymer such as Terra Cottom Soil Conditioner™ to increase plant establishment rates. Use a fertiliser low in phosphorus. To determine if your fertiliser is suitable, check the N:P:K (nitrogen–phosphorus–potassium) composition. You want the one that contains less than 3% P.

Using organic fertiliser means that run-off from school grounds into waterways will carry less detrimental sediment and chemicals. Organic fertilisers are both naturally occurring such as manure, worm castings, peat and seaweed, or manufactured, such as bone meal, seaweed extract and more.

## What time of year are you planting?

Planting just before or during the wet season (November to May) will require less watering. If you plant during the dry season (June to October), plan for effective irrigation. Will your plants require maintenance during the school holidays?

Plot out on your patch the height and width of plants when they are mature. Calculate the distance needed from buildings, structures and other plants. Will the roots disturb pathways at maturity?

## Location, location, location...

Trees develop better root systems and can have fewer problems when grown in mulched areas rather than lawn areas. The young tree is disadvantaged when its roots are forced to compete with grass roots for water, nutrients and oxygen.

Plants can be sun or shade loving. Where should they be planted in relation to the school buildings? Plants can also be sensitive to salt. How close is your school to the ocean?

What is the topography of the school grounds? Is it flat or hilly? Where does the rain water flow and collect in the yard? What direction does the wind normally blow? Do you need to select species that are strong wind tolerant?

Some trees are known to be:

- drought resistant/tolerant
- fire resistant/retardant



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- Flood resistant/tolerant

Plants grow at different rates. Fast growing trees have positive characteristics:

- Providing soil erosion protection
- Providing shade to suppress weeds
- Creating a cool surface for understory species to grow beneath
- Like full sun and respond well to disturbances such as fire
- Produce many seeds.

Fast growing plants include acacias, figs, the Leichhardt tree, the white mulberry tree, the glueberry tree and the macaranga.

Slow growing species also have positive characteristics including:

- providing habitat for native animals
- providing extensive roots for erosion control
- excellent canopies for shading out weeds.

Slow growing trees includes the Burdekin plum, the native damson and the pongamia.

### References:

Cullen K., Herse K., Mangru (2003) *From Seeds to Success: A bush regeneration manual for Townsville, Thuringowa and the Burdekin*, Tropical Urban production and Landcare Group, Townsville.



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