



Knox Nursery:

US: Ellepots help growers, landscapers reduce costs

Knox Nursery was founded in 1962 by Jim and Nada Knox who were considered two of Florida's bedding plant pioneers. The company has evolved into a 14-acre operation with over 700,000 square feet of greenhouse production. The company propagates young starter plants from seed and vegetative cuttings, which are sold to wholesale and retail growers. It also produces finished plants, which are sold primarily to Florida landscapers, landscape contractors, hotels, resorts, theme parks and independent retail garden centers.



Knox Nursery started using Ellepots in 2004 and is producing both young plants and finished plants in this stabilized medium.

Challenge

Knox Nursery was looking for a way to differentiate itself from its competitors selling to the landscape market. The company sought to increase the efficiency of its production methods while helping its customers also save time and money.

Solution

Knox Nursery started using Ellepots in 2004. The company is producing both young plants and finished plants in Ellepots.

"We started using Ellepots on the finished side of the business first," said company president Bruce Knox. "The reason we started selling finished Ellepots was to differentiate ourselves from our competitors that were growing 4-inch annuals in plastic pots. An 80 mm Ellepot is equivalent to a 4-inch plastic pot. The response by the landscapers was very good and we ran into very few objections."

When Knox was considering the switch to Ellepots he visited with the head horticulturist at one of Florida's theme parks which he supplied with landscape plants.



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"I asked this person to try the Ellepots in the park's landscape plantings and to provide us with feedback," Knox said. "Initially this person wasn't interested in trying Ellepots and thought they were just another bio peat pot. After discussing this person's concerns she finally agreed to give Ellepots a try. She called me about a month later and said she had ONE issue with Ellepots ... She going to have to reduce her planting crew size by 25%, from 4 people to only 3 people. That kind of response represents what most of our landscape customers notice about Ellepots. It is much more efficient to handle Ellepots than it is to handle plastic pots or loose fill trays."



Knox Nursery president Bruce Knox figures his company has prevented 50 million plastic pots from being dumped into landfills by landscapers who have changed to Ellepots

Ellepots helps Knox Nursery provide a product to their landscape customers that will either save them on labor or offer them a way to do 25% more work with the same amount of labor as with plastic pots or loose filled trays.

Benefits

Knox Nursery annually produces 150 million young plants and 6 million 4-inch annuals. Knox said his company started to become serious about sustainability when it determined it could help its customers resolve the problem of what to do with empty plastic pots.



Growers who purchase Ellepots from Knox Nursery to do their own propagation, have the option of choosing the cell size, substrate components and type of paper.

“There were simply no environmentally friendly options for disposal, so we switched the bulk of our landscape business to production in Ellepots,” Knox said.

Ellepots have been designated a Veriflora Approved Input Material paper pot. Since making the switch, Knox figures his company has stopped 50 million plastic pots (6-7 million pounds of plastic) from going into landfills.

Apart from the environmental benefits, Ellepots also have financial benefits as paper is less expensive than plastic pots + Growers can save production time in the greenhouse as plants can be transplanted early without a problem is necessary.

Knox Nursery has the equipment to manufacture every size Ellepot from 20 mm to 90 mm. The company offers pre-filled Ellepot trays in a variety of sizes and tray configurations.



The Ellepot paper Knox Nursery uses for plants supplied to landscapers degrades quickly. By the time a landscaper changes out a landscape with another planting, the paper is broken down and can be tilled into the bed.

“Ellepots are considered to be a stabilized medium,” Knox said. “Ellepots can be manufactured by the growers, which can help them control costs, including shipping costs. Growers can make the Ellepots as they need them. A grower doesn’t have to order a full truckload and have them sitting around. Ellepots give growers the flexibility to have some control over their manufacturing process. Growers can also manipulate the type of substrate components that go into making the Ellepots.”

Knox said he can manufacture Ellepots to each grower's specifications.

"If a grower requests straight European peat moss we can do that," Knox said. "If they want coconut coir or Canadian peat moss, we can do that too. The paper used to manufacture Ellepots is a degradable product. There are a variety of types of paper to choose from, including those with very high polyester content which makes the Ellepots extremely strong."



Knox is currently using a landscape AP paper. "This paper degrades faster and usually within two weeks if you pull on the paper it falls apart and flakes away," he said. "You can still see the paper, but it has no strength left to it. By the time a landscaper would go into the bed to do another planting, the paper would break down and can be tilled right into the bed. There's basically nothing left."

Knox also sells Ellepots to nursery growers, who prefer to plant their trees in Ellepot EP paper, which has a high polyester content.

"For nursery growers, if the paper degrades too quickly that can lead to problems if they are trying to hold the liners for a year before the plants are transplanted," Knox said. "Nursery growers usually want a deep product--an Ellepot that is 6 inches deep or even deeper than that."

All Ellepot papers are documented and ECO friendly and are certified according to industry standards such as Rain forest Alliance, FSC, DIN Certco and Veriflora.

"We do poinsettias for outdoor landscape plantings in 80 mm Ellepots," said Bruce Knox, president of Knox Nursery. "The poinsettias are planted outdoors directly into the landscape beds with no cold protection. The landscapers normally plant out the poinsettias around Nov. 1 and the plants usually make it through to Christmas, and even past the first of the year. Then the landscapers come in with a winter planting of pansies, snapdragons, petunias and other cold-hardy annuals."