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**Firefly experience: rapid growth
supports tree planting strategy**

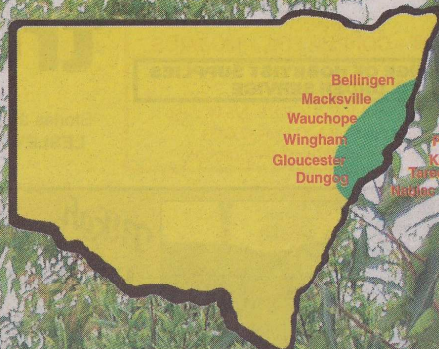
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**Kick start
for trees**

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Rapid growth supports tree planting strategy

Stories and photos by
LESLEY PENFOLD

DWARFED by the trees which were planted just over 12 months ago on his Firefly dairy farm, Basil Schneider admits he is still amazed by the exceptional growth and success of the plantings.

But for revegetation advocate Matt Kilby, who was commissioned to design and plant the windbreak, the health and growth of the plantings is no surprise. It's the result of his tree planting strategy that concentrates on soil health principles, utilising mineral and microbe balancing.

The windbreak which involved the planting of 350 trees late in 2006 was a project undertaken by Karuah Great Lakes Landcare and funded by the Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority. A further 220 trees were planted 12 months later on another section of the boundary during a Landcare field day last November.

Members had the opportunity to view the results of the earlier planting which had lost only four trees under Matt Kilby's unique Plant Pink tree planting system.

Founder of Trees for Earth, a company dedicated to high quality productive vegetation, Matt Kilby has devised planting methods which places great importance on ground preparation through to maintenance, especially for the first two years.



He chose mixed native species including eucalypts, wattles and casuarina and rainforest

trees that provide an annual leaf drop and nutrient rich mulch. Hoop and Bunya pines and flame trees will add more diversity with colour and seeds (which could be harvested) and cabinet timbers could also provide an income in the future. Taking pride of place is a red cedar planted only three months ago and is already several feet high and picture of health.

The 375 acre property, 'Apple Glen', once dominated by apple trees, white mahogany, grey gum and scrubby gullies is now predominately kikuyu pasture.

The thriving trees in the windbreak, at 15 months have already outgrown the trees Mr Schneider planted for a windbreak on another part of the property six years ago.

While trees on farm

RED CEDAR only four months old takes pride of place in Matt Kilby's planting at Firefly

provide valuable shade, shelter and wildlife corridors, Matt Kilby believes trees should be an integral part of the landscape, planted in a way that they can add to the farm's soil health and ultimate productivity.

While acknowledging the cost of around \$15 each to plant and maintain the trees, Mr Kilby says with 97 per cent tree survival rates, along with exceptional growth and the potential early maturity of millable timber, it is a sound investment.

"A kick-start in the first 24 months has reduced maturity time by up to 60 per cent, making it possible to harvest cabinet hardwoods within 15 to 20 years," he added.

Matt Kilby is unashamedly passionate about his tree plantings and the valuable role trees play in the repair of the land, water and air which has been degraded by our modern farming methods. "Every tree counts," he says, strongly espousing maximum survival, growth rates as well as simplicity of care.



PLANT PINK: protected by the Trees For Earth tree guard, a popular rainforest species, Lace bark is thriving at three months old.

Aim for maximum survival

TRREES are rarely planted into healthy fertile soils says Matt Kilby. "They are mostly planted into marginal land that has been often run down by past intensive farming practices. These soils tend to be compacted and depleted in a range of essential minerals, soil biology and organic carbon (humus).

"Soluble salt-based fertilisers only exacerbate these problems by burning out further organic carbon and soil biology, locking up more minerals, and creating 'lazy' roots that do not expand beyond this high analysis nutrient source," he explained.

"These fertilisers often only supply nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium without the full spectrum of trace elements, silica, calcium and organic carbon. In addition, high levels of soluble nitrogen produce weak spindly growth with a visual foliar flush, but little root development. This unbalanced nutrition often leaves the plant susceptible to insect and disease attack," Mr Kilby said, adding that soluble phosphorus also tends to be too 'hot' for most native plants.

"Ideally, a fertiliser should incorporate a full range of buffered and stabilised minerals in both fast and slow release formats, and include structures that physically 'open' the soil and maximise water and nutrient holding capacity, encouraging roots to explore outwards and downwards," he added.

To ensure exceptionally high survival rates for tree seedlings, Matt Kilby recommends what he calls the Plant Pink system.

He starts the process by identifying any serious mineral and soil biological deficiencies with a soil test and then deep rips

the area using a Yeomans Plow that cultivates the soil by lifting and loosening it gently, causing minimal soil profile disturbance.

After marking out the tree spacings for the windbreak at Apple Glen and mindful that rainforest species do not grow well in competition with grasses, he removed all grass by using a herbicide glyphosate and an equal amount of fulvic acid.

Matt explains if you normally use 1.5 litres of glyphosate per hectare, cut it by one third and add an equal amount of fulvic acid, ie: 1 litre of glyphosate with one litre of fulvic acid per hectare. He calls this "sustainable herbiciding."

Working on the Dyers Crossing site with a team from Karuah Great Lakes Landcare and the CMA, Matt explained the importance of digging the holes

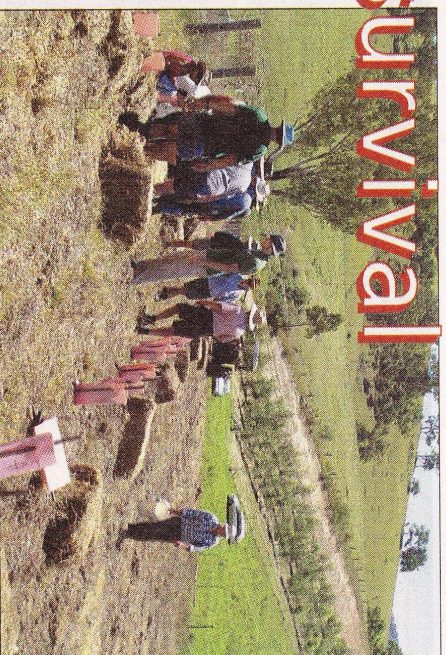
deeper than the pot and making sure the edges are not smooth.

Tree starter was placed into the planting hole to ensure tree roots come into contact with plant-available nutrients as well as a thriving population of beneficial microbes capable of providing ongoing balanced food to the tree.

Planting the tube stock which Landcare had sourced locally, the root ball of each plant was just covered with soil, leaving a depression to hold water.

Liquid tree tonic comprising seaweed, fish emulsion and trace minerals was watered in to limit stress and feed soil biology.

The final steps were to put down weed mat, set up tree guards around each tree and mulch the ground outside the tree guard, finishing off with a



LANDCARE and the CMA members get together with Matt Kilby to plant the second windbreak at Apple Glen.

spread of prescription blend or carbon-based fertiliser around the mulch perimeter.

Choosing the colour pink for his tree guards is not just a quirky idea. Matt Kilby's theory supports the fact that green leaves absorb

light from the red fraction of the spectrum to drive photosynthesis.

Research has demonstrated that the colour pink reflects and focuses the red fraction, concentrating this photosynthetic energy to enhance plant growth.



ONLY three months old, a eucalyptus Grey Gum. Matt Kilby and Basil Schneider check the progress of the second windbreak plantings which were carried out last November.

OUR COVER: A Grey Gum stands 14 foot tall at just over 12 months old. Photography by LESLEY PENFOLD