

BIOSECURITY

UNWANTED HITCHHIKERS

Thinking of renovating your garden and off to the local garden centre to buy new plants?

Do you realise that most of the plants that you buy from your local garden centre are not grown there, but are probably grown by large wholesale nurseries either in WA or interstate? This makes economic sense because many nurserymen specialise in particular types of plants, and some plants, such as palms, grow much faster in sub-tropical areas in Qld and the NT than in the cooler climate round Perth. Most gardeners are unaware of the huge trade in plants that occurs both within states, and between states.

This trade in horticultural plants has some inherent risks. Pests such as fire ants, and soil-borne pathogens such as *Phytophthora* may be inadvertently moved on nursery stock and introduced into new areas.

Although there are no controls on the movement of plants within WA, there are controls on the importation of plant material from other Australian states in order to minimise the risk of introducing exotic pests, pathogens and weedy plants. There are, however, no restrictions on the importation of nursery plants into WA, as long as they comply with specific guidelines policed by the WA Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Are nursery plants a route by which soil-borne pathogens could be introduced into WA from interstate? DAFWA has just published the results of a survey that shows that the potting mix is a high risk route for this state. *Phytophthora* was present in 7 and *Pythium* was present in 12 of 15 consignments of plants, while plant pathogenic nematodes were present in 12 of 13 consignments.

The nursery industry in Australia has long recognised that soil-borne pathogens are readily spread within and between nurseries, and are extremely difficult to eradicate. The Nursery and Garden Industry Australia has developed best practice guidelines for producing plants free from root diseases, such as those caused by *Phytophthora*. This is a voluntary accreditation scheme that gives the purchaser confidence that the plants do not carry unwanted hitchhikers. Accredited nurseries are listed on the industry's website: www.ngia.com.au

So, if you want to buy the best quality plants for your garden renovation, check out the website and buy from the best.