

****ASK THE TAFE TEAM****

**With TAFE Queensland South West Horticulture Teacher, Paul Luck
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Question: *Which potting mix should I use?*

Answer: Potting mix or media is defined by The Australian Standard AS3743:2003 as ‘a growing medium suitable for the establishment and development of a wide range of plants in containers’.

The quality of a potted plant’s growth is largely determined by the quality of the potting mix that it is grown in. A plant in garden soil can send its roots in all directions to access water and nutrients, but for a potted plant to be healthy it must have good conditions in the limited area around its roots (as it is confined to its pot or container).

Most potting mixes sold in Australia are now mixtures of organic materials, sometimes with a small amount of sand, but no natural soil. The main organic material used is composted pine bark, but there can be varying amounts of composted organic material, coir fibre/peat, natural peat, animal manures etc. Often by-products of local industries are used as components of potting mixes (e.g. Mill Mud and Begasse are by-products of the sugar industry in Queensland, and are used extensively for a variety of horticulture purposes including as a component of potting media).

A good potting media should:

- provide anchorage and support for the plant
- drain well
- have adequate pore space for air and retention of moisture
- provide the plant with required nutrients for a period of time
- be free from pests and diseases

To be guaranteed of the quality of bagged potting mixes, it is best to use products that display the Australian standards logo. There are two recognised standards in bagged potting media; for standard mixes the black 5 ticks logo and for premium mixes the 5 red ticks logo. The Australian standards provides all gardeners with a “set of requirements which will ensure that potting mixes can germinate seeds, grow seedlings, strike cuttings and maintain plant growth”(Australian Standard Potting Mixes AS 3743—2003 p.5).

Another advantage of bagged mixes is that there are potting medias produced for a wide range of plants (e.g. camellia and azaleas, cacti and succulents, and orchids).Not all plants have the same requirements of their growing media, so these specialist mixes are formulated to meet the needs of plants with specific requirements.

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Basically if you use Australian standard guaranteed products, you have a much better chance of growing successfully in pots or containers.

Happy potting.

For more information about TAFE Queensland South West's horticulture and landscaping offerings or for any other courses, please visit www.tafesouthwest.edu.au or call 1300 914 754.

Disclaimer: The comments provided in this article are general in nature only and are not a substitute for professional advice. The author accepts no responsibility for any action taken by a reader in relation to this article.

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