

Growing Strong Roots: HydraFiber Investment Improves Nursery Operation, Plant Quality

*PETITTI GARDEN CENTERS
Bedford, Ohio*



Founded in 1971 by Angelo Petitti, Petitti Garden Centers has grown and evolved from a small landscaping business to one of the country's most innovative growing and retail operations. As both a grower and retailer, Petitti has a unique advantage that allows him to stay on top of shifting trends, deliver excellent service and provide top-quality products.

As the owner of multiple nurseries, a greenhouse and nine year-round garden retail centers, Petitti's operations produce and sell millions of plants annually. To keep up with the demand, Petitti needed a growing media that can meet a variety of crops' needs and is also consistent, cost effective and sustainable. After extensive research and trips to see other facilities, Petitti made the transition to HydraFiber®.

HydraFiber is a premiere growing media because it brings stability to media costs while delivering agronomic advantages. The uniquely engineered fiber substrate has a low bulk density designed to improve consistency, porosity and water availability for plants.

Petitti first incorporated HydraFiber into his nursery operations at the Willowbend and Ridge Manor locations. After seeing substantial improvement in the shrubs and trees, he implemented HydraFiber in the greenhouse at Casa Verde Growers. As one of the first large-scale

tree and shrub growers to innovate with HydraFiber, Petitti saw the benefit the substrate could have on plant quality and achieving supply chain security.

"HydraFiber has really been a game changer for us not only by reducing the cost on the mix, but the availability of it," Petitti said. "It doesn't take a lot of space. From that standpoint, it's been a real winner, but also the way the product performs. During the warmer months, we would have macrophylla hydrangeas in the afternoon that would flag, but they're not flagging anymore. The HydraFiber is holding the moisture there that would get them through the afternoon."

Production manager at Willowbend Nursery Hernie Rosado ran trials from late summer to the beginning of that October and immediately knew that HydraFiber was the substrate they were looking for. HydraFiber has replaced peat moss and perlite in Petitti greenhouses and nurseries. Mixing at a 30% inclusion rate, HydraFiber is helping plants root up to 30 days faster among other benefits.

"The HydraFiber limits the fertilizer leach out, and there's much better color on material," Rosado said. "We aren't losing the fertilizer with watering anymore. That's really what I'm seeing more than anything."



**"IF YOU'RE GOING TO
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LONG TERM, YOU NEED
TO INVEST LONG TERM."**

ANGELO PETITTI, OWNER,
PETITTI GARDEN CENTERS



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HYDRAFIBER AT PETITTI GARDEN CENTERS

Petitti streamlined and automated his potting systems to improve efficiency with HydraFiber's processing equipment developed by AgriNomix®. These machines are designed to easily fit into mix lines and return the highly compressed bales back to their fibrous state to maximize yield. HydraFiber processing equipment can look intimidating to growers, but as Petitti said, "If you're going to be in this business long term, you need to invest long term."

INVESTING IN HYDRAFIBER

Throughout his career, Petitti has noticed the biggest roadblock for smaller operations to grow is the lack of equipment and space. His recommendation for growers is to go see the equipment in action before deciding if it's right for their operation. Additionally, invest in the right potting barns, space and equipment.

When Petitti transitioned the potting and mixing systems to incorporate HydraFiber, the process was smooth, but there was a learning curve due to the substrate's excellent moisture retaining capabilities.

"It's really been seamless," Petitti said. "There was just a little bit of adjustment in the beginning to train the guys and to make sure that they would be much more conscious of the watering. We didn't have any issues whatsoever, so it was much easier than I thought it would be. It's been really, really good for us."

HydraFiber is helping to cut costs on all fronts for Petitti's operations. Before transitioning to HydraFiber, Rosado's location was going through 100 semi towers of peat moss. Now, they're only using 10 loads of HydraFiber.

"It's great to have resources that are nearby and sustainable," Rosado said. "And the cost of fuel and freight, on top of the great results we're having, HydraFiber seems to be the future."

HydraFiber's support team is also available every step of the way to guide and provide expert knowledge on watering, optimizing pH, filling pots and more.

"Service was exceptional," Petitti said. "When we first started, HydraFiber's team was a phone call away if we had any questions whatsoever. That really helped make the transition very, very easy."



HERNIE'S TAKEAWAYS

- Take chances. Things won't change if you aren't willing to try new things.
- Continue trialing inclusion rates. Hernie and his team are incrementally testing different inclusion rates to see what works best.
- Do your research. Hernie began researching HydraFiber four years before implementing it and keeps learning materials on hand for his team.

Our thanks to Angelo and Hernie for talking with us about Petitti's Garden Centers. If you're a grower or blender interested in learning more and starting HydraFiber trials, visit HydraFiber.com or reach out to us at hydrafiber@profileproducts.com or 800-496-0955.

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