

# REAL ORGANICS

**STORY AND PICS: STEVE FALCIONI MHMA**

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Would you be surprised to hear that many products sold in Australia under the guise of being organic are not? The reality is that clever or misleading marketing is rife in the world of organics so educate yourself and your clients about what organic really means and how to identify organic products.

## **WHAT IS ORGANIC?**

Most people think an organic product does not contain undesirable chemicals, was made in an environmentally friendly way, and is generally safe for the environment. The reality, however, can be quite different from these popular notions.

The word organic technically refers to a product containing carbon, therefore many things can be called organic (like petrol or plastic). While labelling petrol 'organic' does not fit with the public's perception, the manufacturer would be breaking no laws.

There has been phenomenal growth in the organics sector in recent years as more and more people choose organic over conventional

products. This growth, combined with a willingness by consumers to pay a premium for organics, means it's very appealing for companies to call a product 'organic' even if it contains nasty ingredients. In doing so they aren't breaking any laws and it's easier for them to change product packaging than change ingredients.

## **CERTIFIED ORGANIC**

Luckily there are ways to ensure you are buying genuine organic products and that's by choosing Certified Organic or Registered Organic products. Australia currently has seven independent certifying organisations that maintain their own Organic Standards but which must meet the AS6000 guidelines (governed by the ACCC). Products are assessed against these Standards and if they pass are allowed to be called Certified or Registered Organic. Certified products will have those words printed on the label along with the logo of the certifier. The two largest domestic certifiers are Australian Organic (formerly the BFA) and NASAA. There are overseas certifiers as well but most organic horticultural products in Australia are assessed through Australian certifiers.



Organic Standards enforce strict criteria around how a product is manufactured, what ingredients it contains and what impact it has on the environment. In essence they meet the public's perception of what is truly organic. Think of Organic Standards as similar to Standards Australia which applies to many industry products. One of these is potting mix and if it complies with the Premium or Regular Standard it carries the printed ticks confirming quality assurance. No ticks and it could really be anything.


### WHY CERTIFICATION IS ESSENTIAL

When it comes to horticultural products it can be difficult to work out the safety or organic credentials of a product. Certainly the regulatory body APVMA doesn't always get it right (remember Rogor and Lebaycid?). Nor can you trust the manufacturer whose priority is sales. Having an independent organisation assess the product, including all the ingredients and manufacturing processes, provides for a standard check for quality assurance.

Insecticides can be especially confusing because only the active constituent is required by law to be included on the label. As an example, the active spinosad (derived from soil bacteria) is allowable under Organic Standards and so eco-naturalure is eligible as a Registered Organic fruit fly control product. However, if you see spinosad on another product it does not automatically mean it is a genuine organic product. Active constituents usually make up a very small part of what's in the bottle, the bulk being a mix of emulsifiers, surfactants, preservatives, colours, fragrances and other things. Many of these do not meet Organic Standards because they are deemed harmful, produced from a genetically modified source or contain nano particles. For these reasons

products such as Yates Success are not permitted in organic farming even though they contain spinosad.

Turning to fertilisers, it is extremely common to see things like 'organic based' or 'contains organics' on labels. Such products contain some organic nutrients, like fish emulsion or animal manure, but they have also been fortified with synthetic fertilisers. This makes them ineligible for true organic growing. Neutrog's Rooster Booster is a Registered Organic pelletised chicken manure but Yates Dynamic Lifter varies. Originally this product was truly organic and the large commercial sizes still are. However, most of the consumer packs are fortified with synthetic fertilisers and labelled as organic-based. See how quickly it starts to get confusing?

So if you or your clients want products for organic gardening, choose Certified or Registered Organic goods. Remember to look for the certifiers' logo on the packaging. 

→ **Organic Crop Protectants (OCP) specialises in developing and manufacturing organic garden products for commercial growers, landscapers and home gardeners that are safe for us and the environment. The OCP home garden range of chemical free products is called Eco Organic Garden.**

→ **For further information visit the websites below or call Steve Falcioni at OCP on 1800 634 204 or email [steve@ocp.com.au](mailto:steve@ocp.com.au).**

→ **[www.ecoorganicgarden.com.au](http://www.ecoorganicgarden.com.au)  
[www.ocp.com.au](http://www.ocp.com.au)**

**CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT.** eco-oil – Certified Organic; eco-naturalure product range – Certified Organic; Australian Organic certification label (formerly BFA); NASAA certification label; Neutrog Rooster Booster – Certified Organic

