

## THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY IS THROUGH THE SOIL

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### Growing Up In Dirt

When I close my eyes it's not hard to go back to my childhood on that 1500-acre farm in the Appalachian mountains of North Carolina. It's not hard at all. I can still hear the chugging sounds of the tractor engine as it pulls a small trailer platform. I can still feel the rhythmic bumps and shimmies as the large tire treads move through the dirt underneath. The vibration runs through my body as I lie on my stomach while placing the plants into the earth with one hand and sweeping the hole closed with the other. Row after row, hour after hour, on and on it goes. I recall many aches and pains, but I recover quickly because I am young and exactly where I want to be at just five years old on the back of the family tractor doing what we do on the farm. Even now, I can smell the dirt. I always smell the dirt. I connect with it.

My siblings never really took to working the soil. For me it was always the opposite. I looked forward to it and enjoyed the entire process from sowing to reaping. Some seasons the farm was dry and dusty and stingy and other seasons it was more amenable and a bit more generous. It always gave us what it gave us and we didn't argue much at the end of the day. Like most farms, we made use of different forms of fertilizer in those days. Incidentally, it's important to note that the use of organic based fertilizers is not a new concept. For generations farmers used what we now call organics in the planting fields. I remember, as a child, mixing cow and horse manure with other natural waste material on the farm and then spreading that mixture on the fields with a manure spreader. It was effective and increased the crop yields but it was messy and not very easy to work with. I also remember when the farm changed over to using synthetic fertilizers. These chemical fertilizers were so much easier to apply than manure. We could spread chemical fertilizer using a 40 ft. applicator, which was significantly larger and easier to manage than was our manure spreader. But there were downsides. I recall my first experience as a child using the new fertilizers bought for the farm. It didn't take me long to realize that if I handled the products with my bare hands they would become red and irritated. This lesson was reinforced on several occasions when I mistakenly brought those irritated hands to my face or wiped sweat out of my eyes.

Not very long after those early lessons on the farm, my family moved to a smaller piece of land in Charlotte, North Carolina. My forty plus years in the "greens" industry began there innocently enough. Near the age of twelve I decided to open my own nursery and used cuttings from existing shrubs around the house to generate my stock inventory. It was a great disappointment, as you can imagine, when my stock inventory failed to survive. Some of my greatest joys came later on when I would take plants on the brink of death and bring them back to live healthy lives. This is still a hobby that I engage in, even today, when time allows. It's a great source of satisfaction taking a plant that someone has given up on and nursing it back to health.

## Landscapes on an IV Drip

It was in the early '80's that I started my first landscaping company, Styles Lawn Care. I provided complete landscape care, from proactive consultation and diagnosis, to fertilization and maintenance. Although I used synthetic fertilizers, the only fertilizers available at the time, I promoted a no-watering philosophy based on letting Mother Nature do what she does. I never really equated watering with plant health. On the family farm we never provided irrigation other than that which Mother Nature provided. We did our part and God did his. I understand the concept, though, because all living things need water. But what we've done as a society, in part, is give up on Mother Nature and take matters into our own hands. My customers became accustomed to using synthetic fertilizers and watering on a regular basis. There was constant pressure to keep up with the Joneses and everyone wanted a lush green lawn for prestige and because they thought it represented health. In reality this practice put our landscapes on a constant IV drip in an attempt to achieve that unrealistic ideal without regard to the decline it caused in our landscape. You see, the use of synthetic fertilizers causes soil compaction and salt induced drought. Poor soil structure and frequent, shallow watering results in a shallow root structure. Years of applying synthetic fertilizers compress the soil and kill microbes and other beneficial key components in the soil. I kept thinking to myself... "This is the opposite of sustainability!" I was applying what I thought was a balanced approach to fertility in a 50 lb. bag, but in reality I was enabling my customers and making the problem worse. I had been using synthetic, chemical fertilizers for years but it wasn't until this point that I knew that this was the wrong path to plant health. I finally understood that the path to sustainability and prolonged plant health was through a balanced approach to soil health, not through the use of chemicals.

Since those early days I have taken the time and energy to learn a great deal about plants of all kinds and the environment. In addition to being a fifth generation farmer, I hold many certifications including those of Master Gardener, Clean Stream Administrator, Turf Grass Professional and that of a Certified Plantsman, just to name a few. These are impressive to some, I suppose, but I'm still more impressed with all of those farmers who fed us for generations without holding any of them. I guess it's all about perspective. Anyway, when I'm trying to make a point to a customer about bringing Mother Nature back into our landscape, I often ask people, "When was the last time you saw someone water the forest? Or, when have you seen anyone fertilize a meadow?" When our homes were built in the urban landscape nearly all of the healthy soil was stripped away at final grading, taking the healthy, living soil along with it. You see, healthy soil relies on living microbes, beneficial bacteria and many other key components in the soil food web. This intricate food web is what gives healthy soil porosity, easier root paths into the subsoil and improved air, water and nutrient exchange through the root zone. This is present every day in the forest – it takes care of itself – but our urban landscapes contain none of it! When I explain this to my customers you can see the reaction in their eyes first, then a smile creeps across their face as the realization takes hold. They get it. Right then and there THEY GET IT and they JOIN THE REVOLUTION and become foot soldiers for the cause.

This is the message I bring to the public on a daily basis and the mission continues.

## Organic Plant Health and Sustainability

In late 2005 I was filling in as host on a local radio show, The Carolina Gardener on WBT-AM 1110, with my friend and business partner of many years, Alan Talbert. A listener called after hearing me talk at length about the benefits of using organic based products in the landscape and how this practice promoted sustainability. The caller asked a question that resonated with Alan and me and it was simply this: "Where can I get these organic products for my landscape? I'm sold!" (At that time, professional grade, organic based landscape care products were not widely available for mass distribution to the residential consumer.) After the show Alan, a marketing business owner of 15 years said, "Billy, we need to bring these products to the public. We need to reach these people with a contemporary message and we need to scream it from the mountain-top." To which I responded, "What we're going to do is this... We're going to pioneer organics in America's landscape with a balanced approach to soil and plant health. We'll rebuild the urban soil through the course of years and recreate sustainability in the landscape."

In November of 2006 Organic Plant Health was born. Having always been an inventor, I used that same creativity and ingenuity to develop formulas and products that would serve one simple objective – putting Mother Nature back into America's landscapes. We now provide an extensive line of organic based care products specifically designed with the residential, commercial and agricultural consumer in mind. Our products are very successful and we are fulfilling our mission to provide organic, natural and environmentally responsible products for the residential do-it-yourselfers and the professionals, alike.

How do you put your roses to bed?

A few months later Alan and I were walking through the Southern Spring Home and Garden Show in Charlotte, North Carolina and we bumped into Paul Zimmerman, owner of Ashdown Roses, a nursery in South Carolina. We began talking about roses and I asked him, "How do you put your roses to bed?" Paul looked at me, puzzled. I said, "How do you close the plant down to help it endure the stresses of winter?" He wasn't completely sure what I meant, but he had his own agenda on his mind. Ashdown Roses had joined forces with Peter Beales Roses in the UK and they were looking for a company that could develop a complete, all natural rose care product line. I knew exactly what he wanted and developed the skeleton of the product line within a couple of weeks. It was not a stretch for us since it tied in directly with what we were doing in some other applications for our customers. The principle was the same: Put biological life into the soil along with other key components needed for healthy soil and you have a happy plant. Taking that concept, we developed a series of formulas designed specifically to give roses what they need throughout the growing season. These formulas became the foundation of what is now known as the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program.

This program is the first complete All-Natural, rose care program designed to care for your roses for an entire season. Interestingly enough, Peter Beales has never endorsed a product of this or any other kind before. Needless to say, we are honored that he and Ashdown Roses selected Organic Plant Health to produce this exceptional line of rose care products. Because this program is complete, you need not ever buy a rose care product outside of the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program.

Currently, the program consists of several core elements that provide plant nutrition, soil health and disease management for an entire season.

Good Morning Roses™ - Early season soil and rose fertility formula

Good Afternoon Roses™ - Mid season soil and rose fertility formula

Good Night Roses™ - Late season soil and rose fertility formula

Good Health Roses™ - Natural fungicide and insecticide formula

Bye-Bye Beetles, Bugs & Grubs™ - Controls annoying insects including

## Japanese Beetles

Coupled with easy-to-follow instructions, the core program takes all the myths and hard work out of caring for your roses. Never before has a rose care program been so complete and easy, with no chemicals involved that can have harmful effects in your landscape or the environment.

All granular products in the program provide numerous benefits to the soil:

Put complex biological life into the soil

Increase microbial activity

Improve soil porosity

Promote root development

Contain Endo & Ectomycorrhizae for improved root development and nutrient uptake

Provide premium microbial food sources

Increase water holding capacity

Improve soil fertility

Supply calcium rich formulas

Reduce sodium toxicity

Reduce mineral leaching

Improve CEC's (cation exchange capacity)

Reduce heavy metal availability

Increase availability of many trace elements previously bound in the soil from toxicity

Improve chelation

Good Morning Roses™ is formulated to wake up your roses and give life to your soil during the springtime. It is an early season formula that jumpstarts microbial activity in the soil, which supports root health as well as cane and bud production while making nutrients more available to the plant during this important time of the year. Good Morning Roses™ contains an organic blend of natural slow release fertilizers rich with living microorganisms and various sources of organic matter.

Good Afternoon Roses™ is a mid season formula that maintains soil health and suppresses disease in the soil. It also provides nutrition for plant health and bloom production during this stressful time of the year.

Good Night Roses™ is an end of season formula to help prepare the plant for the rigors of winter. Key nutritional components help the canes adapt to winter stress and minimize dieback. At this time of year we concentrate on fully hardening off the canes to withstand winter temperatures. This allows your roses to sleep safely throughout the cooler season.

Good Health Roses™ consists of natural fungus and insect control. It is applied at various times throughout the growing season to minimize damage from fungus and insect infestation. It is effective at decreasing both short and long-term effects resulting from black spot, powdery mildew and other pathogens and common concerns affecting roses.

Currently the products are available for retail sale in the following sizes:

10 lb. box	Feeds 7-13 plants	\$19.95 (+ s/h)
25 lb. bag	Feeds 18 – 33 plants	\$42.95 (+ s/h)
50 lb. bag	Feeds 35 – 65 plants	\$64.95 (+ s/h)

We welcome inquiries from Botanical Gardens and Rose Societies for bulk orders and special programs.

### Product Application

For the typical garden rose bush that is 3 ft. high and 2-3 ft. wide, we recommend applying 1 lb. of product. For 50 roses of a similar size the cost would be \$1.30 per plant, per application. To view a simple product calculation chart to help you determine the amount of product for the different sized roses in your garden, please visit our website at [organicplantHealth.com](http://organicplantHealth.com) and click on the Peter Beales icon in the lower section of the home page. You can't miss it.

Application rates will vary depending upon the size of your plants, cane density, health of your soil and your individual care practices.

From Atlanta to Tokyo

The past several months have indeed been a whirlwind of innovation and excitement at Organic Plant Health. There's also been a little travel involved with more to come. We debuted the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program at the end of January in Atlanta, Georgia at the Southeastern Flower Show. We were fortunate enough for Richard Beales to make the trip from England to be at the show with us and to help us officially launch the rose care program. Everyone we spoke with was truly excited about the product and what it means for the Rose Community. We met with several local rose societies who now are big supporters of the program. In fact I went back to Atlanta recently to speak at a function hosted by the Greater Atlanta Rose Society (Hi to Chris, Victoria and Kitzy, by the way). While in Atlanta, we also had a nice visit with Margot Shaw, Editor of Flower Magazine and she has asked to do a feature story on Organic Plant Health and the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program in Flower Magazine's summer edition. Please contact her for a copy of that article, or better yet, subscribe to the magazine and see for yourself. After recovering from Atlanta we launched the product again in Charlotte, North Carolina at the Southern Spring Home and Garden Show. This is our hometown Spring Show so we went all out by sporting one of the largest booths in the Outdoor Living Area. This is a very exciting show and one of the largest on the east coast. We were excited about this year's show not only because of what it meant for the rose program but for Organic Plant Health, in general. Our business is growing every month and we're getting inquiries from newspapers and other publications all over the country about our philosophy, our products and our plans for the future. We also work with several high profile gardens and destination points that will, no doubt, raise awareness about us as those names leak out. I guess when you make a public statement about "Pioneering Organics in America's Landscape" you should expect the phone to start ringing.

After the Charlotte Show, we make our way to New York in April for the Great Rosarians of the World – East, honoring William Radler, and sponsored by – you guessed it – Organic Plant Health. This year's theme of Sustainability was just too hard to pass up. Alan Talbert and I will be in attendance so please introduce yourself and say hello if you happen to be reading this at the event. After New York we move forward to our European launch at the Chelsea Flower Show in London. I'm not sure what to expect at Chelsea, but I suppose we should prepare for a big event since our host, Peter Beales Roses, has won 17 Gold Medals in the past 25 years. Later in the summer our world tour takes us to Tokyo, Japan. During a weeklong celebration of flowers this summer the Japanese government is honoring the Peter Beales family for their contribution to roses in Japan over the past 10 years. This is sure to be quite an event and we're honored to have the invitation because of our association with the Beales family. From what I understand Peter Beales has quite a following in Japan so we're expecting a warm welcome to the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program.

For more information about the Peter Beales Complete Natural Rose Care™ program, upcoming additions to the program, or about Organic Plant Health and the other products we provide, visit our website at: [www.organicplanthealth.com](http://www.organicplanthealth.com) or contact Alan Talbert, Vice President and Director of Operations. He can be reached at 704-841-1000 or via email at: [alan@organicplanthealth.com](mailto:alan@organicplanthealth.com). If you're interested in having me or a representative of Organic Plant Health speak at an upcoming event, please inquire via email at: [info@organicplanthealth.com](mailto:info@organicplanthealth.com).