

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Putting the *ease* in trees

Recognised at the 2025 WorkSafe Awards, Natural Growth Partners' Tree Coach™ system is helping reshape tree planting through safer installation methods, smarter design innovation, and a long-term commitment to healthier urban landscapes.

LANDSCAPING VICTORIA

For many in the landscaping industry, tree planting has long been accepted as physically demanding work. Repetitive, labour-intensive, and reliant on traditional methods that have changed little over decades.

But Melbourne-based Landscaping Victoria member Natural Growth Partners is challenging that thinking through its innovative Tree Coach system, recently recognised at the WorkSafe Awards 2025.

Tree Coach™ received the Workplace Health and Safety Solution of the Year award, recognising the product's ability to improve both workplace safety and long-term tree establishment outcomes across landscaping and civil construction projects.

Founded by brothers Tim and Rob Buruma, Natural Growth Partners was born from more than 30 years of experience within the commercial landscaping industry and a growing frustration with outdated staking methods and the workplace risks associated with them.



Their goal was to create a safer, more efficient, and more sustainable approach to tree establishment; one that could improve landscape outcomes while reducing the physical strain placed on workers during installation.



The result was Tree Coach™, an all-in-one planting and watering system designed to eliminate traditional stake ramming and reduce repetitive lifting, awkward bending, and overhead work on site.

Through consultation with contractors, councils, and installation crews, the system has continued to evolve, with the latest version delivering improved ergonomics, faster installation times, and greater structural rigidity.

Natural Growth Partners invested more than \$250,000 into new injection moulds and hundreds of hours into research and development to refine the product.

Manufactured in Melbourne using recycled plastics sourced from kerbside



Tree Coach™ all-in-one planting and watering system

and e-waste streams, Tree Coach™ also reflects the company's broader commitment to sustainability and circular design principles.

Importantly, the innovation extends beyond the product itself. The team has delivered more than 1,000 hours of product training with contractors and council crews, helping businesses integrate safer installation methods into everyday operations and Safe Work Method Statements.



For the landscaping industry, the award highlights the growing role innovation can play in improving safety, sustainability, and the long-term success of urban landscapes, proving that meaningful change often starts by rethinking the fundamentals.

To learn more about Tree Coach and its award-winning tree planting system, visit Natural Growth Partners

naturalgrowthpartners.com.au

PLANTING WITH PURPOSE

Rethinking the *future* of urban forestry

Urban trees are essential to cooler, more liveable cities. They support biodiversity, reduce urban heat and improve community wellbeing. But as climate pressures intensify and urban density increases, the challenge is no longer just planting more trees, it's ensuring they establish, survive and deliver long-term value.

ARBORGREEN

While demand for urban planting continues to grow, the systems and materials supporting it are under increasing strain.

Supply challenges, safety considerations and rising sustainability expectations are forcing a rethink of traditional approaches. The future of urban forestry will be defined not just by volume, but by smarter, more considered planting methods.

Supply constraints and sustainability pressures

One of the most visible pressure points is material supply, particularly for products that have long been standard practice. Hardwood stakes are a clear example.

For decades, they have been widely used to support young trees, but they are typically single-use, rarely recovered, and increasingly difficult to source at scale. Pressure on forestry resources, combined with regulatory and land-use changes is reducing availability and driving up costs.

Project expectations have also shifted. Tree planting is now assessed across its full lifecycle, with greater scrutiny on embodied carbon, material sourcing, and

end-of-life outcomes. In this context, single-use materials are becoming harder to justify.

The reality for installation crews

There are practical considerations on the ground too. Traditional staking methods often rely on repetitive manual handling and tools such as post knockers, contributing to fatigue and increasing the risk of injury. Oversized stakes—sometimes up to 2.4 metres—may also be specified regardless of tree size, increasing material use and placing additional strain on crews during installation.

These challenges are driving interest in solutions that are safer, more efficient, and better aligned with modern sustainability goals.

Tree Coach 2: a smarter approach to urban planting

One example is the second-generation Tree Coach system, developed as an alternative to traditional staking methods. Tree Coach 2 combines a watering well with a modular staking system, designed to support tree establishment while simplifying installation.

Manufactured from recycled e-waste and post-industrial plastics, the system responds to growing demand for materials with lower environmental impact. It allows for one to three stakes, with 1.2 metre and 1.8 metre height options to suit common urban planting scenarios, enabling practitioners to tailor support to the tree and site conditions rather than defaulting to oversized solutions.

Installation is straightforward and does not require post knockers. Components

are assembled by hand, placed within the planting hole, and backfilled as usual. Trees are secured using standard tying methods, maintaining familiar practices while reducing physical strain on crews.

Designed for reuse, not disposal

A key advantage of Tree Coach 2 is its reusability. Unlike hardwood stakes, which are often discarded after a single project, the system is designed to be recovered and reused across multiple planting cycles.

This reduces material waste and can deliver cost efficiencies over time, particularly for organisations managing ongoing planting programs. Additional components can be added as needed, providing flexibility without requiring full system replacement.

Looking ahead

Urban forestry is at a turning point. The pressures facing the industry are real, but they are also creating space for innovation.

Traditional materials like hardwood stakes will continue to play a role, but they are unlikely to remain the default in all situations. Solutions like Tree Coach 2 demonstrate how the industry can respond by combining practical design, improved safety and circular material thinking, helping ensure urban planting is not only scalable, but sustainable for the long term.

For product details, specifications and installation information, visit arborgreen.com.au

