

# Industry News

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# COMPANY Spotlight

## DIATOMITE CANADA

[www.diatomitecanada.com](http://www.diatomitecanada.com)

AKA Northern Lights Hydroponics  
by the Diatomite Canada Team

**ONCE UPON A TIME** I had a chemistry set that contained a microscope, slides, and all sorts of neat things to look at and experiment with. Among some onion skin, metal filings, and insect wings was this stuff I couldn't even spell called diatomaceous earth (DE). I examined DE under the microscope and like most kids became bored and never thought much about it after that. Many moons have come and gone since then (about 500), and many thoughts as well, but through my involvement with hydroponics and specializing in growing media my thoughts have come back to DE again.

I started retailing in the early eighties, working in a home centre and custom cabinetry business. I gained a lot of business experience there and in 1993, after a suggestion from my brother, I decided to venture out on my own. I looked at different retailing opportunities but chose hydroponics because it was interesting and very few people were aware of its market potential.

At that time the indoor gardening industry was just starting to flourish, so I contacted the owners of Homegrown Hydroponics and opened my first store, Northern Lights Hydroponics, in Windsor, ON, Canada in 1994. In a few years a partnership was formed with Tom Page, owner of Vantage Hydroponics in London, ON, resulting in the formation of a retail/wholesale business called Ontario Growers Supply.

At Ontario Growers Supply we reached out to markets that normally would not relate to hydroponics. We approached many, including Orchid Growers, making them aware of how hydroponics related to them as a technology that could be applied to any plant. We participated in home and garden shows, orchid shows, horticultural club functions, master gardener events, etc. We soon realized the enormous potential of this untapped market. Meanwhile, a growing market was develop-



ing in Niagara, my hometown area, and my brother Dean and I opened Northern Lights Hydroponics (Niagara), the home of Diatomite Canada.

About three years ago I was working our table at the Niagara District Orchid Society show and a few of the members and growers were asking me if I was familiar with this new special medium they had read about in an American Orchid Society newsletter. A commercial orchid grower gave me the phone number of Joe Di Domenico, of Diatomite USA, who was distributing "Freshwater DE" in North America at the time. I contacted Joe and asked for what information and samples he could give me, and my thoughts turned to DE again.

I have learned a lot of things about DE in the last few years and how integral a part it will play in the renewal of the planet and all living things. It is not only a superior growing medium but also a vital energy food source for people, plants, and animals.

We find that if given a choice the consumer will choose a natural approach as long as it works and is not cost prohibitive.

DE consists of billions of microscopic fossilized remains of highly advanced single celled aquatic plants called diatoms. These organisms settled over billions of years, forming large deposits of lightweight porous rock similar to glacial rock deposits covering most of the planet. Not all DE is the same and only a few "fresh" water deposits are suitable for horticulture. Diatomite imports product mined from an exceptionally pure fresh water source in Australia and is available in four sizes:

- Fine #1: 1/32 to 3/16 in., 0.5 to 2 mm. Primary uses: propagation, plugs, punnets, seed trays, seedlings, underlay and top dressing for turf and container gardens.
- Small #2: 1/16 to 1/4 in., 2 to 7 mm. Primary uses: from roses to gerbenas and any garden plant, tree, or shrub; as a potting mix for planter boxes, rooftop gardens, orchids and bonzai; can be used as a snail and slug barrier, pet litter, and oil and chemical absorbent.
- Medium #3: 1/4 to 5/8 in., 7 to 15 mm; Large #4: 5/8 to 1 in., 15 to 25 mm. Primary uses: all hydroponic systems from NFT to aeroponics, from medium to large orchids (#3 or #4). A 100 per cent organic pest barrier and aesthetic topping for potted plants, or blended with your media of choice (e.g., soilless mixes, coconut) or as thermal insulation for ceilings, etc.

Diatomite can be used alone or combined with any other growing medium, is lightweight, pH neutral and super-absorbent, holding up to 150 per cent of its own weight in water. This absorbency and excellent lateral water movement insulates, aerates, and promotes capillary action, slowly releasing soluble silica and at least 14 major, minor, and trace elements to the plants as required. Diatomite minimizes leaching and runoff, significantly reducing watering, and because its shape is multi-faceted, oxygen is able to penetrate to the plant's root zone without any difficulty. Sterilized during processing, this non-toxic 100 per cent organic medium is environmentally friendly (low salt, EC), reusable, and recyclable.

Diatomite research shows the slow release of soluble silica promotes stronger, healthier, higher-yielding plants that can mature more quickly. By feeding the medium (earth) this energy is transferred directly to the plant, stimulating self-acquired resistance (SAR) and increasing their resistance to infection and disease. This is the only growing medium that energizes and actually feeds your plants. From orchids to

...cont'd on page 30

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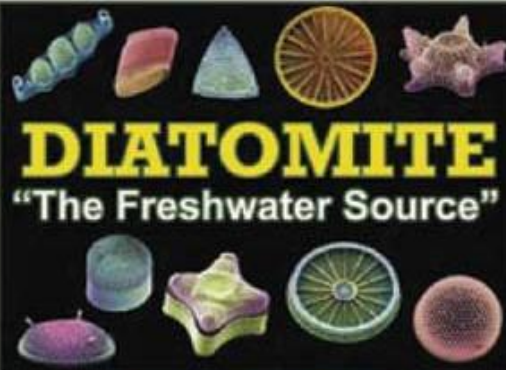
grapes, all greenhouse vegetables, and fruit, Diatomite provides an inexpensive, lightweight quality growing media for any horticultural need.

Recently, Diatomite became a part of developing a specific combination of media for the orchid grower market called Aussie-Gold. It is packaged in four ready-to-use sizes and has become a favourite mix for all growers. As the licensed manufacturer/distributor for Canada we are busy preparing for the spring orchid replanting season. For more info go to [www.aussiegoldcanada.com](http://www.aussiegoldcanada.com).

Although the volume of our business is with horticultural media applications, DE has many other uses. DE fine micron dust is used in agriculture as a non-toxic, non-hazardous safe alternative to chemical pesticides. There is a growing awareness of our relationship with nature and the environment, and that awareness is what is driving the market to develop organic/natural alter-

natives to traditional practices. We find that if given a choice the consumer will choose a natural approach as long as it works and is not cost prohibitive. This has been demonstrated clearly in the increased sales of diatomaceous earth, natural pest controls (e.g., nematodes), organic fertilizers, or any other earth-renewing product (go to [www.agroreencanada.com](http://www.agroreencanada.com)). DE is currently used in fire-resistant materials, fire-retardant paints, and water filtration systems.

And as we rediscover DE in newly developing nanotechnologies and DNA research, or as a healing food source for all living things, we keep coming back to the future — the Diatom. The future of DE can be found in its past; as we open the ancient burial sites around the world we keep finding the original grain, seed, or flour packed with DE (fossil shell flour) and the intention of lasting forever. From chemistry sets and on, DE will be with me always — a seed, a thought, an infinite life force. 



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- Sterilized during processing DIATOMITE is PH neutral, has excellent lateral water movement and a low salt content (EC), making it reusable and recyclable.
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