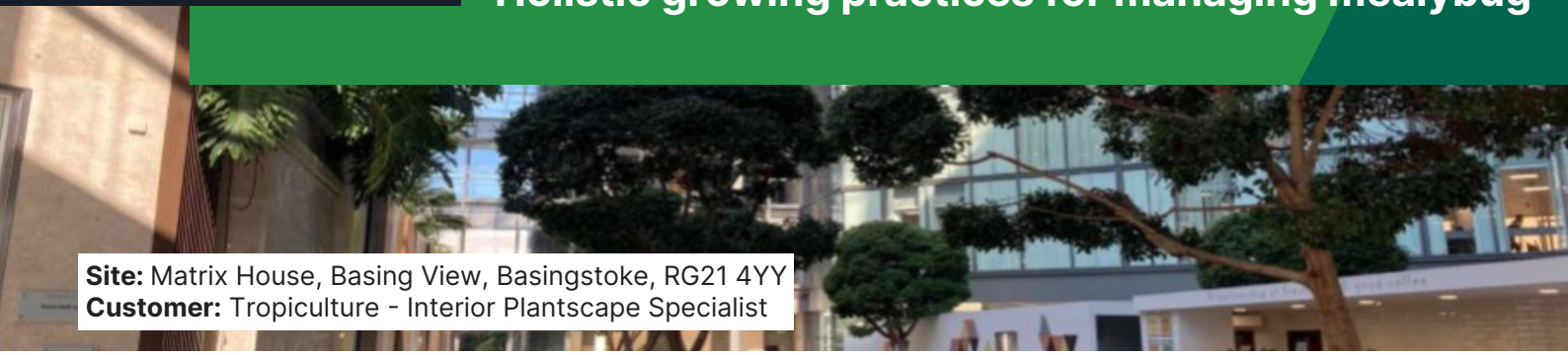
Case Study

Holistic growing practices for managing mealybug



Site: Matrix House, Basing View, Basingstoke, RG21 4YY
Customer: Tropiculture - Interior Plantscape Specialist

THE CHALLENGE

Six mature Ficus trees located on the ground floor of a busy office builiding at Matrix House were showing severe signs of stress during spring 2025.

Symptoms included:

- Significant leaf drop
- Leaf discolouration and thinning canopies
- Bare tops on several trees
- A persistent and escalating mealybug infestation, causing sticky residue on seating and flooring

Despite an exisiting pest management programme at the site, mealybug populations continued to increase, and overall plant performance deteriorated.

BACKGROUND & GROWING CONDITIONS

- Trees planted in a Nieuwkoop Europe compost blend containing grit and LECA Zeostrat used as surface dressing

- Containers were fixed with no drainage, leading to standing water at the base

- Nutrient programme consisted of 1.5kg Osmocote (5-6 month) per container, applied once per season at varying depths

A compost analysis conducted in June 2025 revealed elevated ammonia levels, suggesting nutrient imbalance and potential root stress.

In response, a switch was made in late August to a plant-based organic fertiliser (DCM ECOR 6) at a similar application rate.

Photo sent by customer to show the damage to the trees
28th May 2025

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TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT
An on-site visit took place on 24 October 2025 following continued decline.

Key findings:
- Severe mealybug infestation still present
- Heavy leaf drop and visible plant stress
- Sticky residue affecting public areas

Compost, tissue and pathogen analyses were undertaken to gain a clearer understanding of the underlying issues.

Outcomes of Analyses:
- **High nutrient levels in compost,** including nitrates and several micronutrients
- **Low nutrient uptake in leaf tissue,** indicating restricted root function
- **High electrical conductivity** in the growing media
- **Traces of *Pythium*** detected in pathogen testing

The results indicated that the growing media had likely become anaerobic due to standing water, severely limiting nutrient uptake despite nutrients being readily available in the compost.

THE SOLUTION
A multi-step corrective strategy was implemented:

1. No additional fertiliser applied – nutrients were already present in excess
2. Standing water removed from containers
3. Irrigation adjusted to little and often, using plain water only
4. Top layer of compost removed and replaced with a coarse, peat-free shrub mix (Jiffy), containing integrated DCM nutrition
5. Introduction of **PhytoPrime I** to promote natural resilience within the affected Ficus trees.

PhytoPrime I was used to **encourage natural plant resilience**, enabling a faster and more effective response to ongoing mealybug pressure without placing additional energy demand on the already stressed trees.

Ficus trees before the mealybug outbreak.

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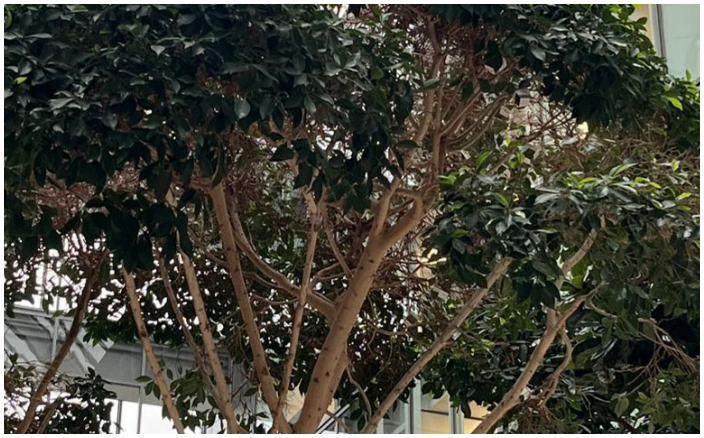
RESULTS
At a follow-up visit on 15 December 2025, clear improvements were observed:

- First signs of new growth in many months
- Leaves were noticeably darker, stronger, and healthier
- Significant reduction in mealybug numbers
- Sticky residue and heavy leaf drop had ceased
- Remaining mealybugs appeared inactive or non-viable

Even the most severely affected tree near the building entrance, which had lost a substantial proportion of its canopy, showed new growth patches emerging.

The customer was highly satisfied with the progress, particularly given the challenging indoor environment and public-facing location.



New growth and darker leaves on the trees.

New growth coming through.

Most severely affected tree near building entrance, showing new growth patches on 15th December 2025.

"Through implementing this holistic growing strategy and introducing PhytoPrime I, we've seen a significant increase in leaf growth and overall leaf density across the Ficus trees. The plants look noticeably healthier and stronger, and the level of mealybug pressure has reduced dramatically. For the first time in months, the trees are actively growing again and presenting well in a busy public space." **Tropiculture**

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Tree nearest building entrance: December 2025

Tree nearest building entrance: February 2026 shows new growth

Close-up of leaf shows mealybug is dicoloured and hard, no live mealybugs were found during the site visit in February 2026.

NEXT STEPS

Further compost analyses and pest monitoring are planned throughout early 2026 as the trees move toward the next growing season, with adjustments to be made only if required.

SUMMARY

This case study highlights how a holistic growing strategy, combining water and nutrient management with the introduction of PhytoPrime I, can significantly improve plant performance and reduce pest pressure.

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