

# Dhofar Eco Bug

Infesting the nation with an environmental conscience...

19 June 2012

## Could We Grow Fruit Trees in the Omani Desert?!

Well, if a certain Dutch inventor is to be believed, then the answer is a resounding yes - and we could do so without irrigation!

Pieter Hoff is the founder of a company that has pioneered a planting technology called [Groasis](#). Yesterday he was in Salalah to give a presentation at Dhofar University and introduce the concept to us.

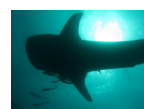
Mr. Hoff began by talking about the global problem of depletion of groundwater reserves. He stated that 4 countries in the world have no groundwater at all. He didn't say which countries these were, but if that statistic is true then it is truly shocking. He also went on to talk about how groundwater is becoming contaminated with salt water (an issue which apparently exists here in Oman). With this shortage of water and a growing population (expected to hit 10 billion in the next 25-35 years) he concluded that there needed to be a way for agriculture to use less water. It was this thinking that led him to develop the '[waterboxx](#)'.

Mr. Hoff pointed out that, in nature, trees can and do grow in the desert and in rocky areas. Anyone who has visited the desert here will know this to be true. In other words, there *is* enough rainfall in the desert to sustain plant life. The problem isn't actually the quantity of rainfall (more rain falls in the desert than we imagine) but the fact that it all falls in a very short time period (perhaps 2 weeks). Seeds therefore germinate when the rain falls, but then everything dries up and the young plants die. Without getting too scientific, Mr. Hoff's '[waterboxx](#)' is a bio-mimicry technology - in other words it copies how Mother Nature solves the problem of growing trees in desert regions. The [waterboxx](#) assists the tree through the planting period until it can reach natural water and self-sustain. A lot of this is to do with having the right kind of roots (called primary roots) which allow a plant to break through hard ground (even rock) to reach water. Mr. Hoff explained this very well, but I suspect I'm failing to! Anyone wishing to understand the subject better would be well advised to look at the [website](#)!

Overall, the technology came across as simple yet clever and, importantly, affordable. No irrigation is necessary and it appears to have an excellent success rate, judging by existing projects in various countries around the world. In future there are also plans to make the [waterboxxes](#) from cellulose material. In a country like Oman, that would mean being able to make the system from readily available materials like palm leaves.

Whilst [Groasis](#) is evidently a business and Mr. Hoff will of course have a vested interest in its success, I really found his argument to be very persuasive. If this technology works and is adopted it could have multiple positive effects - reduced reliance on

## About Me



### Dhofar Eco Bug

Salalah, Dhofar, Oman

Dhofar Eco Bug aims to help conserve the natural beauty and biodiversity of the Sultanate (and Dhofar in particular) through increased awareness of, and action on, environmental issues in the region. This 'bug' hopes to be highly contagious - infecting the nation with an environmental conscience!

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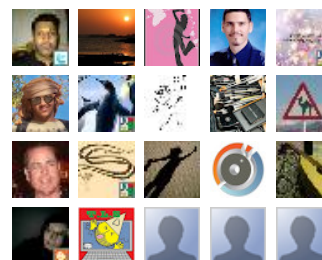
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groundwater, reforestation of desert areas, food production and a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions due to an increase in trees. It seems like a very good result. Interestingly, a planting experiment using this technology has already taken place in Sohar Free Zone. I don't know when it was initiated, but it would certainly be of interest to know how it is proceeding.

Incidentally, I should say that I am in no way affiliated to the company - I just found the product to be very interesting and thought you might too!

Mr. Hoff says that his dream is to replant the 2 billion hectares of land that man has cut over the last 2000 years. I wish him every success!



Groasis planting experiment at Sohar Free Zone, Oman.

Image reproduced from <http://www.groasis.com/en/photos/photoalbum/oman>

Posted by Dhofar Eco Bug at 20:13 

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