

## Wildflowers of the Sydney Region and Their Suitability as Cut Flowers

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### INTRODUCTION

There are over 6000 plant species throughout NSW with many showing tremendous horticultural merit. This paper will focus on several species with horticultural potential from the Sydney Region which have been of great interest to me for many years. In recent years there has been an escalating interest in our native species for use as cut flowers both on the domestic and export markets. With demand expanding, it has become essential for commercial row cropping to take place rather than rely on material harvested from wild populations. However, it has been from the harvesting of wildflowers from natural stands that the cut flower potential of many native plants has been realised.

For the development of a strong domestic and export market, the introduction of new and exciting species and cultivars is of utmost importance. When introducing a new cut flower species into cultivation it is essential that the plant has a suitable vase life when cut. As a guide 10 to 14 days is worthy of further investigation. Following this, the ease of propagation, adequate stem length, ease of production, and disease resistance are other significant considerations. From a marketing point of view, filling a period when little else is in flower is an added advantage.

In the past few years, export sales of Sydney region flora including, *Blandfordia* spp. (Christmas bells), *Ozothamnus diosmifolius* (rice flower), *Actinotus helianthi* (flannel flower), *Ceratopetalum gummiferum* (Christmas bush), *Telopea speciosissima* (waratah), and *Doryanthes excelsa* have yielded impressive returns. The strong overseas market demand for these products has meant that greater focus from growers and research institutions has been placed on the production and postharvest development of these species.

### NEW WILDFLOWER CROPS

Having grown and introduced into cultivation many eastern Australian wildflowers for cut flowers, it is my experience that florists want variety of type, colour, form, and texture. Many species from the Sydney region exhibit these characteristics. However, some impediments that prevent some exciting introductions into cultivation are usually associated with difficulties in propagation techniques and the ability to be intensively farmed. For example, *Eriostemon australasius* is recognised as a showy focal filler flower that has been highly sought after by florists and exporters. However, the seed is hard to germinate and cuttings are slow and often difficult to root and thus the development and production of this species is limited.

Conversely, success in the development of rice flower, Christmas bells, and Waratah which do not have the same propagation difficulties, has meant that extensive plantings and selection are being undertaken. An important crop that was recognised at a Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation workshop in 1995 was *Ceratopetalum gummiferum*, the NSW Christmas bush. The cultiva-

tion, selection, and marketing of cut flower stems of this species has been a major success for our business.

For the past few years, our wildflower farm has been working on development and selection of cultivars of NSW Christmas bush. Our initial plantings of seedling stock have given us a sound base from which to draw new and interesting colours and forms. The export returns of cut stems from *Ceratopetalum gummiferum* 'Albery's Red' have been very promising and this recognised cultivar has acted as a benchmark for our new colour selections. There is some interest in the various colour forms that have been found amongst our seedling population, particularly the deep red, white, salmon, and pink types. We are now bulking up numbers of several types of these colours and investigating selections that exhibit increased vigour.

## CONCLUSION

Recent export success has shown what can be achieved with several species that are indigenous to the Sydney region. However, to develop a sound industry base for both domestic and export sales, there needs to be an improvement in quality standards. The development of a strong grower base and the increased production under cultivation will ultimately allow for a consistent supply of uniform products of our unique flora.

Another important aspect in the development of new crops is that there needs to be a greater liaison between growers and researchers. It is almost impossible for a grower to adequately address all aspects of selection, propagation, nutritional requirements, and postharvest treatments for each individual species being trialed on their property.

As a grower of Australian flora we are faced with an exciting opportunity to provide native cut flower material for floral tributes for the Olympic games in the Year 2000. With this platform, Australian growers will be able to showcase the unique, diverse, and unusual flora this country has to offer. The international recognition associated with such an event will no doubt open up new export market avenues and in turn channel funding towards research and propagation of the many species with horticultural merit which have not yet been fully explored.

## REFERENCES

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