

# Should I grow wildflowers? information kit

Reprint – information current in 2000



## REPRINT INFORMATION – PLEASE READ!

For updated information please call 13 25 23 or visit the website [www.deedi.qld.gov.au](http://www.deedi.qld.gov.au)

This publication has been reprinted as a digital book without any changes to the content published in 2000. We advise readers to take particular note of the areas most likely to be out-of-date and so requiring further research:

- Chemical recommendations—check with an agronomist or APVMA [www.apvma.gov.au](http://www.apvma.gov.au)
- Financial information—costs and returns listed in this publication are out of date. Please contact an adviser or industry body to assist with identifying more current figures.
- Varieties—new varieties are likely to be available and some older varieties may no longer be recommended. Check with an agronomist, call the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23, visit our website [www.deedi.qld.gov.au](http://www.deedi.qld.gov.au) or contact the industry body.
- Contacts—many of the contact details may have changed and there could be several new contacts available. The industry organisation may be able to assist you to find the information or services you require.
- Organisation names—most government agencies referred to in this publication have had name changes. Contact the Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation to find out the current name and contact details for these agencies.
- Additional information—many other sources of information are now available for each crop. Contact an agronomist, Business Information Centre on 13 25 23 or the industry organisation for other suggested reading.

Even with these limitations we believe this information kit provides important and valuable information for intending and existing growers.

**This publication was last revised in 2000. The information is not current and the accuracy of the information cannot be guaranteed by the State of Queensland.**

This information has been made available to assist users to identify issues involved in wildflower production. This information is not to be used or relied upon by users for any purpose which may expose the user or any other person to loss or damage. Users should conduct their own inquiries and rely on their own independent professional advice.

While every care has been taken in preparing this publication, the State of Queensland accepts no responsibility for decisions or actions taken as a result of any data, information, statement or advice, expressed or implied, contained in this publication.



Queensland Government

# OVERVIEW

*This book is intended for those interested in the commercial cultivation of wildflowers. Future expansion of the industry will almost certainly be derived from the continued expansion of plantation production, which is more efficient and has a higher level of quality control than wild harvest. However, the bush harvesting of Australian flora is still an important, though declining, component of the total Australian industry, particularly in Western Australia.*

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## History

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Australia-wide between 250 and 300 species of indigenous flora have been commercially picked from the bush for cut flowers and foliage. Of these, all but 50 originate from Western Australia. Stricter conservation laws in all Australian states and consumer pressures for improved product quality have led to a decline in bush harvesting and a major shift to commercial cultivation in the past 15 years.

One hundred and fifty of the bush-picked species have been brought into at least limited cultivation for cut flowers or foliage. The remaining species, which often have outstanding potential, have presented challenges to commercialisation by being difficult to propagate or cultivate or by being slow growing.

One of the first commercial native cut flower businesses in Australia was established by William Chandler in Victoria, who cultivated and sold bunches of boronia (a Western Australian species) for the Melbourne markets in the late 1800s. In Queensland, Herbert Chippendale pioneered native flower production at Sunnybank, growing waxflower for sale to Dunlop's Florist in Brisbane City in the early 1930s. The mid 1970s saw a geographic shift in the waxflower industry from the Sunnybank area to the Crow's Nest district on the Darling Downs and to the Lockyer Valley, forming the nucleus of the Australian-native flower industry in Queensland as we know it today.

The South African protea industry in Australia is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the early 1970s the Mathews family established a protea plantation in Victoria, followed by a nursery, fuelling interest in the commercial cultivation of South African Proteaceae in Australia. The first Queensland plantations were started in south-east Queensland in the late 1970s.

Collectively, the growers of South African Proteaceae and related species, Australian-native flower and foliage producers and bush-harvesters make up the wildflower sector of the Australian flower industry.

## The Australian wildflower industry

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The total Australian cut flower industry is modest by world standards, representing less than 1% of world flower trade. It is comprised of two sectors: traditional and exotic flowers, such as roses, carnations, chrysanthemums and tropical cut flowers; and wildflower species from Australia and South Africa. Most flower exports from Australia are wildflower species. These are mostly sold fresh, however, a significant market also exists for dried and preserved products.

The value of production of wildflowers (including proteas) in Australia in 1999 was considered to be about \$45 million. Exports account for half of this value. The world market for Australian native flowers is estimated to be about \$400 million, with a similar sized market for South African Proteaceae. Australia faces strong international compe-

tion for this market and produces only a fraction of the total world production. Australia's most significant contribution to global flower production is in waxflower, supplying about 30% of the world market.

### **The Queensland wildflower industry**

Queensland ranks third after Western Australia and Victoria in the total area planted to wildflowers. The principal crops in Queensland by area planted are waxflower, eucalypt and *Protea*, however, kangaroo paw ranks second after waxflower by value of production. Wildflowers are grown in the Lockyer Valley, on the Darling Downs, on the Sunshine Coast and hinterland, in the Wide Bay district, in Central Queensland and on the Atherton Tableland, with more isolated plantings in other areas.

The total Queensland flower industry (including traditional flowers) is worth about \$30 million at the farm gate and has over 800 growers. No reliable statistics are available to indicate the current value of production and numbers of producers within the wildflower sector; however, it is known that the industry has been expanding. Small, family-operated businesses under 5 ha are the norm. In the last major study of the sector in 1993, Queensland had 438 ha or 18% of the total wildflower area planted in Australia (2444 ha). Of this, South African Proteaceae accounted for 15% of the planted area in Queensland.

In most circumstances, wildflower producers are located away from major population centres. The harvest period tends to be very short. Production techniques are evolving, and finding a suitable species or cultivar for a particular location is largely a matter of trial and elimination. Other on- or off-farm activities and/or investment income supplements returns from flower sales on most wildflower farms. However, some self-sustaining traditional flower growers also include wildflowers in their production mix.

About 60% of all Queensland's wildflower production is exported, with the remainder placed on the domestic market. Principal export destinations include Japan and the United States of America. Overseas demand for Australian floricultural products is increasing. Europe and Asian markets other than Japan are becoming more important destinations.

### **Opportunities and challenges**

The Queensland wildflower industry has several strengths, providing opportunities that can be capitalised upon. These include:

- Geographical attributes: both land and water are available, with a broad range of climates and soils.
- Flora: Queensland's native plants are genetically diverse; many are suitable for development into commercial flower and foliage crops.
- Infrastructure: marketing systems and structures are already established; good transport linkages exist, including air-freight space to

overseas destinations.

- Timing of production: early season production in the Australian market and early and opposite season production for Northern Hemisphere markets give Queensland a competitive edge.
- Growers: many producers are highly skilled and work together with high levels of cooperation.
- Demand: international interest in wildflower species continues to grow.

However, future development will depend on how the industry deals with its major challenges. Important challenges confronting Queensland growers are:

- developing and adopting efficient production techniques and improved pest and disease management for wildflowers
- improving productivity and profitability, and developing economies of scale
- improving the management of product quality, both on-farm and through the whole marketing chain
- gaining access to sustainable plant breeding and selection programs that deliver new cultivars and wildflower products that excite international market interest
- expanding existing markets and developing new markets, including educating consumers on product use and handling
- being responsive to global trends and international competition in both domestic and export markets.

Underpinning all of the above, the Queensland wildflower industry will need to invest money and resources into research and development work. An underlying issue is to find the right combination of location, crop(s) and growing practices that will both satisfy consumer demands and give Queensland growers a profitable return on their investment.