

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

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 We advise readers to take particular note of the areas most likely to be out-of-date and so requiring further research: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
- Financial information—costs and returns listed in this publication are out of date.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 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

Growing cut flowers is highly labour intensive and ready access to skilled casual labour is important for farming success. The amount of labour you need for a wildflower enterprise depends on the area planted, what you have planted, when crops come into bloom and how often they need to be picked, and how much weed, pest and disease management is needed.

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Overview of requirements

The physical work of setting up a wildflower farm begins with planting windbreaks if needed, land preparation, installing an irrigation system and planting the crop. Peak labour needs are at two short periods: planting and harvest. Labour is also needed over a longer time frame for ongoing crop maintenance such as weeding, pruning and crop monitoring. The period of greatest demand is during harvest.

Reliable, skilled casual labour is becoming expensive and difficult to find. You must be able to manage a casual labour force and be prepared to train them for the particular picking and packing needs for each wildflower type. Do you have an adequate labour source near your farm? Is a casual workforce readily available when you have special requirements?

Planting

If you're planting a large area you will need enough labour to plant seedlings quickly, otherwise many may deteriorate. It is not advisable to store tubestock for too long on farm as many species quickly become root bound. If it becomes necessary to hold tubestock, keep them in a shadehouse and only for a short time. As a guide, one person can plant 30 to 50 seedling tubes an hour into prepared ground.

The time of planting varies from crop to crop. Avoid periods of environmental extremes. Other aspects to consider are: a satisfactory level of soil moisture to enable ease of digging, likely plant growth following planting and when you are expecting to make the first harvest.

Harvesting, postharvest treatment and packing

Two people can probably handle up to 5 ha of proteas or 4 ha of eucalypts or 1 ha of waxflower or 1 ha of mixed flowers, without needing to employ outside labour.

The amount of labour required from harvesting through to postharvest treatment and packing in the shed depends on the volume of product to be processed each day and how long the cropping season lasts. As a guide you will need:

- two people per hectare for waxflower or mixed flowers
- eight to 20 people per hectare for kangaroo paw
- two people per 4 to 5 hectares for mixed proteas, (which flower at different times)
- two people per 4 hectares for eucalypts.



CYNTHIA CARSON

Grading rice flower

Peak labour loads

Growing a range of flowers that mature at different times reduces the peak harvest labour needs.

Eucalypt. You will need six people to harvest, grade, bunch and pack 15 ha of mixed eucalypt bud and foliage. Most species have an extended harvest period, however there are some bud and flower species that have a narrow harvest window.

Kangaroo paw. Depending on the range of varieties grown, kangaroo paw can have a highly intensive harvest period. A July to November harvest period for 0.5 ha needs four people, whereas an eight-week harvest period for 0.5 ha will need 12 people. Do not plant more kangaroo paw than you can harvest. If you have 8000 plants of one variety of kangaroo paw and each plant yields 30 stems over a six-week period, you will be producing 240 000 stems or 40 000 stems per week, equivalent to 8000 stems per day for a five-day week.

Protea. The amount of labour needed depends on the range of species grown and their flowering times. Two people should be able to pick, treat and pack 4 to 5 ha of mixed proteas producing flowers throughout the year. High yielding crops of short flowering duration such as *Protea* 'Pink Ice', *Leucospermum*, and *Leucadendron* 'Safari Sunset', however, will need two to four people per hectare during harvest.

Rice flower. You will need about five to six people per hectare to pick, grade and pack rice flower. The amount of labour depends on whether you are harvesting in one cut or picking individual stems. If picking individual stems you will need one more person per hectare.

Waxflower. For 5 to 10 ha of waxflower you will need about 15 people at the peak picking period for harvesting, grading, processing and packing.

Labour skills

For best harvesting, treatment and packing for the market you will need to spend time training your labour force. If staff are not adequately trained, they may ruin your crop. Product damaged at harvest has poor market acceptance. New owner-operators also need training in how to pick, prepare and pack the crop. This includes learning when the correct stage of maturity is reached and what constitutes appropriate quality. Consider working for established growers or visiting their farms to obtain this knowledge.

To build up a good rapport with your staff, work with them. This will also help to ensure instructions are followed and that staff work well together. You will need good skills in managing a casual labour force and in resolving conflicts amongst staff.

Where to get labour

Your most reliable labour force will be local people. Use word of mouth to let the local community know of your needs or even advertise in your local paper or on community notice boards.

Obligations to your labour force

There are regulations in the Workplace Health and Safety Act that are designed to ensure a safe working environment for all workers, including the rural labour force. Wildflower growers should be aware of issues such as sun protection, safe handling of chemicals, lifting guidelines, workers compensation and public liability. The Queensland Flower Growers Association and the Queensland Nursery Industry Association routinely provide information to its members on their obligations under this Act.

The same organisations can provide employer members with information on the relevant state awards and superannuation for their labour force.



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