



Getting into commercial wildflower growing

WildFlowers Australia Ltd has prepared this brief overview of the industry for your information. This information is of a general nature and WildFlowers Australia Ltd does not guarantee that the information is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this communication.

WildFlowers Australia Ltd encourages you to become an association member, giving you first hand access to new industry information and a link to other members for shared learning and support.

Industry background:

The Australian wildflower industry is well established with many growers cultivating Australian native and South African plants for cut flowers and foliage for sale on both domestic and export markets. In addition, selected products are wild harvested under license.

The larger part of the Australian flower industry is the traditional flower industry (also called the exotic or soft flower industry), consisting of growers who produce a wide range of products such as roses, chrysanthemums, bulb crops, lilies and the like.

While accurate industry statistics are not available, the Australian wildflower industry is believed to have a market share of 10% to 15% of the total domestic flower industry. Although most of Australia's flower exports are native Australian and South African flowers and foliages, Australia's share of the world production of these products is only a small part of total world trade. In recent years exporting has become less profitable owing to higher freight costs, less favourable exchange rates and competition from lower-cost producers in other countries.

However, a range of new technologies and management practices to improve quality and profitability have been developed through R&D projects and give Australian growers a significant edge.

Furthermore, wildflower growing can achieve better returns per unit area of land and per unit of water for irrigation, than many other agricultural enterprises, provided efficient management practices are applied. In addition, growing wildflowers generally requires fewer inputs of pesticides, fertiliser and water than growing traditional flowers such as roses, carnations and annual flowers.

In contrast to most other horticultural products, cut flowers remain a luxury purchase, and demand and sales can't be guaranteed. They are also a highly perishable product, meaning that flowers generally can't be 'stored' until the market improves.

Our industry is widely dispersed and comprised of some very large businesses as well as a large number of small operations. Wildflower farms are located in many regional parts of Australia and many growers are isolated from other industry members.

Growers use a variety of marketing channels to sell their products, ranging from farm gate sales and direct sales to local florists, to shipping boxed flowers to distant wholesale markets in capital cities or exporting to overseas markets. Wholesalers and exporters charge a commission to sell the flowers.



WFA is working hard to provide industry leadership and networking, with a strong focus on providing information to its members, hosting conferences and developing projects to solve problems. In addition, there are wildflower associations or networks in several states, providing local support and activities.

The Australian wildflower industry welcomes more professional growers who are focussed on being profitable through the marketing of top-quality products. Effective quality management and marketing are extremely important to being successful.

How do you grow the crops?

Most native Australian and South African flower and foliage crops are produced as open-air crops planted in rows in the ground. A few are produced under rain shelters (or simple greenhouses), but only certain species warrant the higher investment required.

Most are woody perennial species (shrubs to small trees), which means you will need to care for the plants for 3-5 years before there are marketable quantities of flowers (and therefore income). Care typically involves pruning, feeding and irrigating the plants as required and managing any pest or disease problems that crop up as well as controlling weeds.

What should you plant?

It is not possible to give you a list of plants to plant. The choice of species to grow will depend on many things including your local climate and soil type, the type of market you plan to supply (and what that market requires) and how much you plan to invest in your business. Flower demand follows fashion trends, and new and improved varieties are under constant development.

Speak to marketers to gain their advice on market opportunities. Domestic marketers are located at Australian wholesale flower markets located in most capital cities, and there are several specialist flower exporters. There are also several grower coops and groups that combine their product for export, thereby gaining economies of scale and more cost effective freight arrangements.

If your property is located inland, you should conduct comprehensive varietal trials to ensure the ones you want to grow are suitable for your region. Effects of climate and location on growth and flowering are not fully defined for all species. Some, such as Christmas bush, will not tolerate frosts more severe than -4°C . Local trials are strongly recommended in order to establish the best combination of species to plant.

What features should your farm have?

Any farm site selected for growing wildflowers should have:

- * adequate good-quality water
- * well drained soil, with a pH of 5.5 to 7.0
- * good access for machinery
- * plantation sites that face north or north-east (and avoid steeply sloping land)
- * power for irrigation pumps, the cool room and the packing shed.

Other requirements for a successful enterprise include:

- * sufficient capital to maintain farm management practices for 3 years until flower harvests bring an income
- * access to skilled labour for crop management, picking, grading, bunching and packing
- * access to technical advice on production, postharvest treatment, and legal, financial and marketing aspects
- * adequate cool room capacity



- * access to high-quality plants
- * convenient access to supplies of farm chemicals, fertilisers, packaging materials and equipment
- * packing shed and storage facilities
- * postharvest disinfestation facilities
- * refrigerated transport to market or airport
- * if exporting, a reliable freight forwarder and a reliable specialist exporter.

Other sources of information:

New book available soon:

Bettina Gollnow (2013): Getting started in wildflower growing -

How to grow native Australian and South African species for the cut flower market

First edition

Being published by RIRDC

WildFlowers Australia Ltd. 2010. Growing proteas for the cut flower market. Cost \$30. To order a copy, please contact secretariat@wildflowersaustralia.com.au

Links to more information:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/horticulture/floriculture>

Interactive guides produced by the Centre for Native Floriculture:

Five interactive scenarios were developed by Margaret Cover at the Centre for Native Floriculture between 2008 and 2010.

Go to <http://scenarios.sblinteractive.org/v2/main/PlayerFrame.aspx> and type the name of the scenario of interest to you into the search box.

The titles are:

- 'I think I want to grow native flowe
- 'Why do good flowers go bad?'
- 'Smart Marketing – the way to success'
- 'Developing new plants for the market'
- 'Managing pests & diseases in a native flower plantation'

Australian Flower Industry Magazine (quarterly)

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Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC)

RIRDC manages R&D investments on behalf of the Australian Government and industry.

The site contains information on RIRDC wildflowers and native plants research projects and resulting publications (to see them all, go to: <http://www.rirdc.gov.au/publications> and search for 'wildflowers and native plants'). Website: www.rirdc.gov.au

*Quality specifications for Australian wildflowers
(2010) published by RIRDC:*

These provide an excellent photo of each product, information about it, and guidance you through the recommended harvest and postharvest care and handling methods, through



photos and charts. Go to the link below to find a list of products for which a specification is available, along with a link to each publication on the RIRDC website.

<http://www.wildflowersaustralia.com.au/files/f/6991/Quality%20specifications%20are%20available%20for%20these%20products.pdf>

There is an accompanying postharvest manual:
Faragher J, Gollnow B, Joyce, D. 2010. Postharvest handling of Australian flowers from Australian native plants and related species,
2nd ed. Pub No 10/027. RIRDC, Canberra: <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/10-027>.

A summary of all R&D projects supported by RIRDC and links to final reports and related publications can be found on this website at <http://www.wildflowersaustralia.com.au/for-growers-and-value-chain-members/wildflower-r-d-information/r-d-project-summaries-and-links-completed-projects-and-projects-underway>

Flower Association of Queensland (FAQI)

<http://www.flowersqueensland.asn.au/>

FAQI has produced a range of valuable industry resources and these are listed in 'the new grower's tool kit' which is a subpage of this one. One is the *Cut flowers best practice guide* that aims to improve sustainable farm management and provides information, references and contacts for growers. Another is the *Cost and profit calculator for cut flowers*. FAQI also publishes the *Australian Flower Industry* magazine.

State government departments

NSW DPI

www.dpi.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries and Mines

www.primaryindustry.nt.gov.au

Queensland Department of Primary Industries

www.daff.qld.gov.au

Primary Industries and Resources, South Australia

www.pir.sa.gov.au

Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia

www.agric.wa.gov.au

Department of Primary Industries Victoria

www.dpi.vic.gov.au

Tasmania Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment

www.dpiw.tas.gov.au