

FLORA

IT'S BLOOMING FLOWERS

by Mike O'Donoghue and Liesl Rohl

THE season has changed and the cool rainy days of winter make way for spring. The warmer weather and longer periods of sunlight stimulate the flowering mechanisms of many of the State's most beautiful and unique wildflowers. Local, interstate and overseas visitors make their annual pilgrimages to their favourite wildflower "hotspots" to marvel at the annual wildflower display.

Licensed wildflower pickers also take advantage of the blooming event and harvest a wide range of wildflowers during the peak flowering season. Many of the State's much sought after wildflowers are exported fresh or dried to overseas destinations such as Japan, Europe and America. Others, including the sweet smelling brown boronia, several species of kangaroo paws and the ever-popular Geraldton wax are sold on the domestic market.

From relatively small beginnings, the Western Australian cut wildflower and seed industry has blossomed into a multi-million dollar export industry. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate a total annual export of native cut flowers in excess of \$15 million. In Western Australia over 240 species of protected flora are harvested for their cut stems, and in addition more than 600 species of seed are collected.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is responsible for the conservation and management of protected flora throughout Western Australia, and for the administration of the Wildlife Conservation Act. In addition, the export of protected flora species overseas is controlled by Environment Australia in accordance with an approved Western Australian flora management program.

*Verticordia grandis*

CALM's management of the wildflower picking industry is principally designed to ensure that commercially exploited species are harvested sustainably, both for the species themselves and for the ecosystem in which they occur.

Quotas and various other management restrictions are placed on some of the more heavily exploited flora species, for example *Boronia megastigma*, to control harvest levels, thereby ensuring sustainability.

Individual pickers taking flora for commercial purposes from Crown land, or those selling flora taken from private property, are required to hold an appropriate commercial flora licence issued by CALM. Nearly 600 Commercial Purposes Licences were issued last year, to take material from Crown land, with just over 500 Commercial Producers Licences issued to cover private land operations. The number of licences issued varies from year to year. The number of Crown land licences has remained fairly constant (578 licences were issued in 1991), while private land licences continue to increase (284 licences issued in 1991).

Some of the most commonly targeted species for cut flowers on Crown land are listed in the table below.

Species	Common names	Location
<i>Agonis juniperina</i>	coarse ti-tree	Busselton to Denmark
<i>Agonis parviceps</i>	fine ti-tree	Busselton to Denmark
<i>Banksia hookeriana</i>	Hooker's banksia	Eneabba
<i>Banksia prionotes</i>	acorn banksia, orange banksia	Dongara to Gingin
<i>Persoonia longifolia</i>	cherry bush	Bunbury to Manjimup to Denmark
<i>Podocarpus drouynianus</i>	emu bush	Bunbury to Manjimup to Denmark
<i>Stirlingia latifolia</i>	blueboy	Dongara to Denmark
<i>Verticordia nitens</i>	yellow morrison	Wanneroo to Gulliderton

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Species most commonly cultivated on private land (at various locations) for cut-flower production include:

<i>Anigozanthos manglesii</i>	red and green kangaroo paw
<i>Anigozanthos pulcherrimus</i>	yellow kangaroo paw
<i>Anigozanthos rufus</i>	red kangaroo paw
<i>Banksia baxteri</i>	Baxter's banksia, bird's nest banksia
<i>Banksia coccinea</i>	scarlet banksia, waratah banksia, Albany banksia
<i>Banksia hookeriana</i>	Hooker's banksia
<i>Banksia prionotes</i>	acorn banksia, orange banksia
<i>Chamelaucium uncinatum</i>	Geraldton wax

Licences to take material from more specialised products may also be issued. For example, whole *Xanthorrhoea* (now called balgas) may be taken from development areas, in accordance with a CALM-approved salvage operation. Banksia cones are taken from the forest floor and turned by skilled craftsman into an amazing array of different artifacts and trinkets. Mallee stems are taken from the eastern Goldfields for didgeridoo manufacture and the flowering stems of the balgas can be processed into sturdy walking sticks. Blossom is "combed" from the sweet-smelling brown boronia plants, *Boronia megastigma*, and distilled to produce oil which is used by the food additive industry. Special endorsements are required to harvest these products.

The overseas wildflower market tends to favour products sourced from cultivated plants on private land as these plants are subjected to more intensive management regimes. Such management results in an improvement in the length and quality of the harvested stems. Disease and insect problems can also be controlled to further improve the quality of the picked product.

Consistency of supply is also a very important component of the export market. This can be more easily achieved from plants produced on private land, but may be less reliable from native flora on

Crown land. There is no doubt that the long-term future of the wildflower industry depends largely upon the development of cultivated plants on private property, and this is reflected in increased private property production. Agriculture WA plays an important role in the floricultural industry on private land. They provide technical advice on the cultivation of wildflowers, and provide valuable support and advice to individual growers in respect to the developments of new products.

Management of flower and seed production from natural vegetation on private property is also increasing as landowners become more aware of alternative values found in their bushland. Such management is intended to ensure sustainability in the harvest so that the natural vegetation, and hence the flora resource, is preserved. This is an encouraging trend with the need to conserve vegetation in rural areas for soil, water and nature conservation.

Springtime is a great time to view our magnificent wildflowers. Take some time this season to enjoy and appreciate one aspect of the State's wonderful natural heritage.

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