

# Breeding new natives for floristry's future

Waxflower is a major filler flower in the global cut flower industry, with a diverse and ever-expanding range of varieties that is owed in no small part to Australian owned and operated company, Helix Australia. Now, the industry leader has launched its first licensed commercial cut flower planting in the United States.

"We're partnering with Mellano & Co., a growing business that's been around for over ninety years and three generations, so it's reassuring to know that our waxflowers are in such expert hands", said Adrian Parsons, Managing Director of Helix Australia.

Helix Australia has specialised in the breeding, marketing and licensing of new and improved waxflower and boronia varieties since 2008. The company has had a very busy ten plus years in developing a range of waxflower varieties including Sarah's Delight, Moonlight Delight, Raspberry Ripple and Pirouette, all of which have just been planted over ten acres in Carlsbad, California.

"Helix varieties have shown very strong sales in Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Europe, and we are confident the roll-out of our varieties in America will be well received by American florists", said Adrian. "American florists have had a small taste of Helix varieties from our Australian and South African growers and the Mellano & Co planting will now ensure supply of our exciting waxflower hybrids will also be available in the months December until May."

Helix Australia licenses cut flower and pot plant growers around the world to ensure a year-round supply of the waxflower varieties. The Helix Australia licensed supply agreement is backed up by a range of trade marketing programmes to ensure the profile of Helix Australia waxflower varieties is prominent across all sectors of the wholesale cut flower and nursery industry. In recent years, new Helix Australia waxflower releases have included Ruby's Delight, Kerry, Dee's Delight and Morning Delight. These varieties have been bred with modern flower growing and floristry in mind, having exciting new colours, unique petal shapes, extended flowering times and improved plant vigour.



Left: Adrian Parsons, Managing Director of Helix Australia, with products exhibited on the Flora Toscana stand at IPM Essen in Germany. Middle: Waxflower Kerry makes a striking addition to a modern floral arrangement. Right: New Helix Australia waxflower releases Kerry (top) and Morning Delight (bottom).

After the initiation of the first commercial planting in California, Adrian spent a week visiting waxflower growers in Israel, to see current plantings and to research the potential to expand with new growers in the future. Israel is the largest waxflower growing country in the world, with the majority of the product exported to the Netherlands. Helix Australia currently has six waxflower varieties under production in Israel and there are plans to expand this to ten to twelve varieties in the near future. "It was fantastic to see the Israel production in full swing and I saw some excellent quality waxflower on well managed farms, with excellent harvest and logistics systems in place", Adrian said.

In addition to its own breeding investment, Helix Australia has also partnered with Kings Park and Botanic Garden to invest in highly sophisticated waxflower and boronia breeding programs. Recently released hybrids from the breeding program include Waxflower Morning Delight, Waxflower Dawn Pearl, Boronia Magenta Stars and Boronia Plum Bells.

Somatic fusion within the *Chamelaucium* (waxflower) alliance has been the major breeding program developed by Kings Park and Botanic Garden. As a result of the program, plant protoplasts (the living material of a plant cell after the cell wall has been removed) from a range of species from the *Chamelaucium* alliance can be reproducibly isolated. Conditions for establishing protoplast cell division and macrocallus formation have also been defined, and somatic fusions of various combinations of *Chamelaucium* and *Verticordia* species have been performed. The fusion environment and techniques are

now well understood and will allow the fusion of a range of taxa from the alliance. Helix Australia forecasts a likely outcome from the program will be a range of hybrids with a bloom size thirty per cent larger than what is currently on the market.

"These are very exciting times for the cut flower industry and for the ongoing development of these flowers that are native to our country", said Adrian. "Along with our sister company Wafex, Helix Australia has over thirty years experience in the growing and trading of waxflower. Helix Australia has developed a global network of premium waxflower growers in South Africa, Israel, USA, Portugal, Australia, Spain and Italy. We're looking forward to the future and all of the exciting possibilities in expanding even further, giving us the chance to bring beautiful Australian native flowers to more people around the world." 🌿

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www.helixaustralia.com.au  
E: adrian@helixaustralia.com.au*



Left: Crop of Waxflower Batavia Pearl growing in Western Australia. Right: Bunching Waxflower Pearl Buttons at Arnelia Farms, South Africa. Top right: *Chamelaucium* hybrids in tissue culture as part of the breeding program developed in partnership between Helix Australia and Kings Park and Botanic Garden.