

Worldwide markets open for native Australian flowers

Adrian Parsons from Helix Australia is expanding international markets for two special Australian flowers. Helix specialises in breeding new varieties of Geraldton wax (Chamelaucium) and boronia (Boronia hetraphylla), native Australian shrubs, for cut flower growers and for the potted market.

Helix Australia was established in 2008 and is wholly Australian owned. The business focusses on the breeding, marketing and licensing of new waxflower and boronia varieties around the world.

There are currently some 30 waxflower varieties available offering a range of colours (tones of pink, red, and white) in single and double flowers. There is a mix of early- mid- and late-flowering varieties as well as tall (for the cut flower market) and compact (for the potted market).

Disposable colour and a filler flower

Waxflower is grown around the world as a filler flower – much like baby’s breath – and is also popular as a compact potted plant. In Europe these potted plants are grown disposable potted colour.

“Pot growers currently prune tall waxflowers four or five times and apply dwarfing chemicals to sell them as compact pot plant,” Adrian explains. “None of that is needed with our dwarf pot selections.”

Adrian is also keen to see them more widely used in landscaping.

“We are talking to landscapers to explain the benefits of our compact waxflowers,” says Adrian. “The new variety ‘Local Hero’ has mauve pink flowers, produces masses of buds and grows to just 80cm high. It was bred at Kings Park.

“A dollar from each plant sale goes to the charity SAS Resources to fund services for returned servicemen and women from the Special Air Service Regiment.

“The plant was recently featured on commercial TV gardening show ‘Garden Gurus’,” adds Adrian.

Major waxflower production is in South Africa, Israel, Spain, Portugal and the US (in California). Adrian is also keen to talk to growers in New Zealand who may be interested in growing the new boronias.

The waxflower varieties arose from a breeding program in Western Australia by Brian Jack from Western Flora nursery. When Brian decided to retire 15 years ago, Helix bought all his breeding stock and set about developing local and international markets.

“We are still occasionally picking the odd variety from Brian’s work,” says Adrian. More recently, Helix has partnered with Kings Park Botanic Garden in Perth to continue the breeding program and expanded into breeding boronias as well.

“We pay Kings Park an annual fee to fund research and development and also allocate a share of royalties from international sales,” says Adrian. “They are producing around 50-60 new hybrids a year for us to select from.”

Adrian is excited about the new boronias. ‘Plum Bells’ and ‘Magenta Stars’ are already on the market with more to follow including a white sport of ‘Plum Bells’, which will be named ‘Sirius’ after the brightest star in the sky.

Helix Australia licenses cut flower and pot plant growers around the world to ensure year-round supply of these exciting varieties. South Africa is the largest grower and supplies into Europe from June to November says Adrian.

“We are expanding in Israel,” he explains. “Growers there supply from May to November so there are wax flowers in the marketplace year round.”

The Helix Australia licensed supply agreements are backed up by a range of trade marketing programs to ensure the profile of Helix Australia waxflower varieties is prominent across all sectors of the wholesale cut flower and nursery industry says Adrian.

“It is very expensive process acquiring plant variety rights and a huge amount of time and money goes into each new variety,” he explains. The plants are protect-



Australian waxflowers are grown as cut flowers around the world



Adrian Parsons with potted waxflower ‘Amelia’

ed in Europe, Israel, South Africa and Australia but, due to time restrictions, they are not protected in the US. Helix provides stock to commercial cut flower growers via local nurseries who are licensed to produce the plants.

“We work on a two-tier royalty system with payments made on each plant produced and also on

the cut flowers (end point royalty).

Eleven nurseries are licenced in Australia include Benara Nursery in WA, Humphris Wholesale Nursery and Southern Advanced Plants in Victoria and Westland Nurseries in Tasmania.

More information about waxflowers and the new boronias is available from Adrian Parsons at adrian@helixaustralia.com.au or +61 418 399 539.

Sustainability award looks to the future

Just beginning on a career in the nursery industry is **Olivia Jones** from Victoria. Olivia recently received a Global Footprints Scholarship sponsored by Garden Centres Association of Australia and the Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria.

The scholarship is available to those following a vocational career (university students or graduates are ineligible) across agriculture, horticulture, trades and

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