



Choosing Cut Flowers to Grow

Determining which cut flower varieties to grow

Step 1: Choose which growing sector

Ask yourself the following questions to determine which of the four general industry growing sectors interest you most: (1) traditional cut flowers, (2) Australian native cut flowers, (3) tropical cut flowers, or (4) foliage. Ensure you take into account the logistics and costs required to make your decisions.

- **Do you wish to grow the plants in containers (eg pots) or in the field?**
- **Do you wish to grow under shelter (eg tunnels) or in the open?**

For the most part, traditional cut flower varieties are grown under shelter with a large percentage grown in pots.

Australian native and tropical cut flowers and foliage are mostly grown in the field with no shelter (except for such structures to shelter crops from wind). However exceptions occur.

- **Do you wish to harvest all year round or only over discrete harvest periods?**

Most Australian native and tropical cut flowers and foliage are harvested once or two periods per year ranging from a matter of weeks to a number of months. Many traditional cut flower varieties can be grown all year round if provided with effective artificial climate control. However exceptions occur.

- **Do you wish to market on domestic or export markets?**

Marketing activities vary between crops. For example, in a 1999 Queensland grower survey it was found that about 95% of growers with their major crop being traditional flowers sold 100% of their crops on the domestic market. About 26% of growers of mostly native major crop did so. Conversely, 31% of native major crop growers sold 100% of their crop overseas but none of the traditional major crop growers did so.

Step 2: Choose possible crops within the chosen sector

- **Do you wish to grow filler flowers or focus flowers?**

Research further using resources such as other *FAQI Fact Sheets* or publications and services listed in *FAQI Fact Sheet 3.2 to 3.4* to formulate a short list of potential crop species within your chosen sector.

Step 3: Research chosen species requirements to identify which you can grow

Research each individual crop in the list and determine which crops match your circumstances. Ensure you take the following information into account.

- Is a market available for this crop or can it be developed? If the latter, how will it be done?
- Does your land and climate satisfy growing requirements specific to that crop's needs?
- Have you the required time, resources and staff to dedicate to the crop?
- How long before the first commercial crop is produced?
- What is required to produce this crop through the year? Plan a typical year's activities.
- Is this a difficult crop to grow and harvest? If so, do you have the experience required?
- Are other people in the industry growing this crop? If yes, contact them if possible to exchange information. If not, ask yourself why. The answers will tell you whether this is (1) an untapped commercial opportunity, or (2) a crop to avoid for one or more reasons.
- Can you obtain starter plants? If so, how much prior notice is required by suppliers?
- Is propagating plants an option for this crop? Have you the inclination, time and experience to do your own propagation? Researching techniques is recommended.
- What legislative, production, postharvest and marketing issues apply to this crop?

Step 4: Determine if more research is needed

If suitable matches are not forthcoming, return to Step 1 to start up a new list. It is better to do the extra research now than to plan a crop and suffer up to 100% losses and lose time and money.

Step 5: Commence preparations

After choosing the most appropriate crop(s) you must commence preparation of your site and obtain plants from the appropriate starter plant suppliers. **Sometimes these activities must commence long in advance of when anticipated plantings occur.** For example, where (1) virgin land needs conditioning, (2) the site preparation needed is dependant on contractor availability (eg clearing, dam construction etc), (3) where structures, irrigation systems and/or shed facilities need to be built. Research whether early-implemented activities such as these apply to your situation, or (4) where propagators require advance notice to prepare adequate numbers of starter plants.

Step 6: Undertake trial plantings

Especially if growing plants without the aid of modified or artificial growing environments, undertake trial plantings as many cut flower varieties are **very site specific**. Even if your neighbour successfully grows a crop, you may not be as successful for a number of reasons. Growing success can also vary between areas on your own property eg different aspects and positions on slopes.

Determine the appropriate duration to identify trial successes. Also, optimum plant numbers for a trial should be determined by crop specifics and your available resources. Replication must be adequate to ensure accurate predictions of growth and flowering performance (eg in some crops, results from trials of 10 plants may give an accurate prediction; in others 30 or more plants may be recommended).

Step 7: Expand plantings of varieties from successful trials

Undertake more extensive plantings of those crops that have trialled successfully to provide a sufficient commercial-sized harvest. Alternatively, modify growing techniques to determine optimum procedures.

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