

SELECTING WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS FOR EXTENDED FLOWERING TIME

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When plants are being selected from the wild we can select various characteristics for different purposes. These may include suitability for pot culture, cut flowers, compactness for gardens, long straight stems for export flowers, and for different flower colours.

It is generally regarded that any species of a Western Australian wildflower will only flower for a short time but, within a single species, there may be many hundreds of variations of flowering times. Flower colour, foliage, and the size of the plant will also vary. In most books reference is made to a species flowering at a certain time, but a knowledgeable plant person would know that by selecting from a wide area on which a species grows the variations can be great. To a nurseryman, landscape architect, botanist, horticulturist, or cut flower grower, a more accurate flowering time is important.

Many species have plants in the wild that flower at different times, and if one makes many visits into the field and observes many thousands of plants it is possible to select certain clones that will greatly increase flowering times. One can extend the flowering season for a species over three months with three different clones, and there may also be three different colours for each month. With even more selection this period may be extended to six months.

With Geraldton wax (*Chamelaucium uncinatum*) we have selected six clones that flower from May to December. There are three colours, pink, white, and purple, giving 18 clones of the one species without even breeding. This makes it a very exciting plant, and increases plant sales over a longer period. This is particularly important for the export of flowers. The flowering period will change with different clones geographically, producing earlier or later flowers on different latitudes. This can vary as much as four weeks in some cases.

Field Selections for Cloning. I have been involved in this area for many years and have worked with several experts on Western Australian wildflowers. I have introduced several select cultivars from this unique flora into cultivation over the past 16 years. These include:

Chamelaucium uncinatum 'Purple Pride' was selected in 1974, and introduced into the trade. It is now the most cultivated Geraldton wax, and is one of the best cut flowers in Western Australia. Up until this time Geraldton wax had been picked from the wild. This clone gave the flowering stem consistently required by the flower exporters and the customers. It has also been an excellent pot and garden plant.

C. uncinatum 'Burgundy Blush' was my next selection. It has a larger flower than 'Purple Pride' and flowers later. This plant is not suited to flower picking due to its pendulous habit, but is an attractive pot plant and shrub.

There are now a large number of selections of Geraldton waxes. We now have a pink form which flowers in May. I am currently selecting flowering clones of white, pink, and purple that will flower in Australia in September, October, November, and December. These will all be available by 1991. These clones along with others being produced by plant breeders make *Chamelaucium* an exciting genus.

Lechenaultia biloba 'Autumn Blue' is another clone I have selected for its flowering "out of season." *L. biloba* normally flowers in August/September, but 'Autumn Blue' flowers from March to September. This deep blue selection is excellent for pot culture and as a garden subject. Using this clone as a parent I hope we will see many beautiful hybrids which will flower for much of the year

Grevillea obtusifolia 'Gin Gin Gem'. Gardens have become smaller and ground covers are in more demand. *G. obtusifolia* is a very popular shrub which normally grows about 2 metres high and up to 4 metres across. I made a selection of a prostrate form and called it 'Gin Gin Gem' as it came from Gingin. This clone is now possibly the most popular ground cover used in the Western Australian landscape.

G. crethmifolia 'Rapid Raider'. Normally grows about 2 to 3 metres high but I selected 'Rapid Raider' as a prostrate form, and have promoted it over the past 16 years. This plant is widely used in Western Australia for freeways and road verges, especially in limestone soils.

Scaevola striata 'Pink Perfection'. This is another ground cover selected from *S. striata*, which is normally blue. 'Pink Perfection' has a deep pink flower which flowers over a very long period of time.

Eucalyptus ficifolia 'Autumn Selection'. Normally *E. ficifolia* flowers in Western Australia in December/January but 'Autumn Selection' flowers in March to May. This tree has consistently been flowering at the same time every year. This selection comes true

E. calophylla var. *rosea*—Autumn/winter selection. This tree flowers in late autumn to winter (April-June) whereas *E. calophylla* normally flowers in February. This tree has consistently flowered at the same time each year for many years. Propagation is from seed, or by budding or grafting.

CONCLUSIONS

My aim is to have a clone flowering in each season, i.e. four clones a year for as many species as possible. Selection from the wild in Western Australia can give an immediate result compared to growing seedlings and selecting from them.

These selections will benefit the plant breeders of the future as I will have presented them with genetic material that has already done some of their work. Hopefully they will be able to enhance flower size and colour. This is a very exciting area of floriculture.