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Incorporating Australian Wildflowers and Native Plants into the National Floristry Curriculum

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Incorporating Australian Wildflowers and Native Plants into the National Floristry Curriculum

by Lana Mitchell

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Foreword

Education of the supply chain has been a key issue for the wildflower industry, with market demand restricted to a large degree by lack of knowledge on the part of florists. As the wildflower industry's products are diverse, unique and seasonal, they will not be asked for if florists do not know they exist. Further, true understanding and appreciation of these products comes through hands-on training to develop familiarity and skill. To date, wildflowers were not specifically detailed in the training package, leaving it up to individual lecturers to emphasise or cover what they wanted or preferred. As a result, many existing florists are unable to identify Australian wildflowers or foliage, do not know how to use them, or have negative views on them based on prejudice or lack of education from their peers or former teachers.

The aim of this project was to facilitate the inclusion of a subject on wildflowers in the training of floral design students in Australia -- both in terms of basic product information as well as care and use of Australian native flora in floral design.

This project worked closely with Service Skills Australia Pty Ltd, the national organisation responsible for formulating and designing the floristry training package for registered training organisations around Australia. The subject of wildflowers has now been incorporated into the competency standards for the training program, and teaching aids and texts are aligned so that all students studying floristry from 2010 will have an understanding of the basics of wildflowers as part of their training program. This will benefit growers, wholesalers, florists and also consumers/customers, here and overseas, and will provide a stable foundation for an industry to build on.

This report, an addition to RIRDC's diverse range of over 1800 research publications, forms part of our Wildflower and Native Plants R&D program, which aims to understand, strengthen and develop markets; improve existing products and develop new ones; provide profitable and sustainable production systems; and enhance the human capital of the industry.

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About the Author

Lana Mitchell is a commercial grower of *Actinotus helianthi*, the Flannel flower, for the cut-flower industry. She is also on the Board of WildFlowers Australia, the national industry body for wildflowers, and she organises and administers the National Floristry Design Competition each year with TAFEs and floristry schools and colleges around Australia to promote and get students using Australian grown wildflowers. With a background in marketing, establishment, personnel, project management and organisation, since becoming a grower she has been working on projects to build the wildflower industry to make it a viable, strong and sustainable industry for Australia.

Acknowledgments

Service Skills Australia Pty Ltd are acknowledged for their cooperation, assistance and hard work to review and upgrade the floristry training package so that it is complete and provides a strong foundation for floral design in Australia. Each member of the consultative content committee that worked to finalise content of the competency standards are also acknowledged – Members of this committee are long standing members of the floral design industry, including senior lecturers at reputable TAFE colleges, the Professional Florist Association and independent schools. Each person was willing to accept someone who was not a trained florist to comment and be part of the consultative process to ensure that the subject of wildflowers was adequately covered in the program. Without their understanding this project could not have been accomplished.

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Executive Summary

What this report is about/Who is it targeted at?

Service Skills Australia, the national body responsible for the development of the floristry training program, embarked on a review and upgrade of the existing training program in 2007. This project was an opportunity for WildFlowers Australia to work with Service Skills Australia to get the necessary information on wildflowers included in the education of florists.

Background

Australian grown wildflowers make up approximately 10% of the domestic cut-flower market – with traditional and exotic flowers being the mainstay of the cut-flower industry. Surveys of existing florists find that many do not know what wildflowers or foliage are available, or how to use or care for them in floral design. The basic information is not routinely covered in training at TAFEs and floristry schools, so students graduate without this education and this reflects then in their choices of product to promote and use in floristry design.

Methodology/Results

Over the course of the project the following information was incorporated into the new floristry training package:

- Students must gain an understanding of the wide variety of Australian grown wildflowers and foliage, their botanical and common names, what they look like, when they are seasonally available, how they can be used in floral design and how they are cared for. This also includes gaining an understanding of what flowers are natively of Australia, and which wildflowers are originally from other countries such as South Africa.
- Students must learn how to design with Australian grown wildflowers and foliage. They need to be able to create Australian native designs, and also know how to incorporate wildflowers with traditional or exotic flower designs.
- They need to know about licensing and government regulation on protected native plants. Some Australian native plants require license from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to be cultivated and sold, or to be wild harvested and sold. Florists need to know what requires license and what their responsibilities are as a florist.
- They need to understand how global warming and climate change relate to the choices they make in purchasing stock. The carbon footprint of a flower grown locally is less than one flown around the world. Australian grown wildflowers are generally drought tolerant and low water users. Some exotic flowers require heated greenhouses, or are forced to flower with CO₂. These are issues are mainstream nationally and globally, and floristry students need to understand these matters and be able to make appropriate decisions relating to them.

In addition to the above, a review of the teaching aids and texts that are available for the use of the floristry training program was undertaken. Service Skills Australia publishes a User Guide for lecturers and teachers, and then two text books for students – one for Certificate II and one for Certificate III. As part of this project these guides and texts were reviewed and information provided to Service Skills Australia so that when these are republished they include the necessary data for students, as well as the resources (such as websites), so students can stay up-to-date and at the cutting edge of floral design.

Implications

In 2009 the final draft of the Floristry training package will be presented to the Steering Committee for endorsement prior to submission to the National Quality Council for final approval. It is anticipated that the new curriculum will be ready for launch by early 2010. This means that all students trained from 2010 will be trained on the subject of wildflowers – finally addressing the situation that was identified back in 2000.

Recommendations

It is recommended as a result of this project that the newly revised Floristry Training Program as developed by Service Skills Australia is supported and promoted. Also, the accompanying User Guide and text books will need to be promoted and made popular with all floristry students for pertinent and relevant information on the industry.

Further, the recently published booklet *Wildflowers From Australia* (another RIRDC funded project recently completed) should be used as a resource for all colleges and all students to give comprehensive information on the extensive and diverse products available to the domestic cut-flower market.

It is also recommended that the existing National Floristry Training Competition, run by WildFlowers Australia and offered to all TAFEs and professional floristry schools, is continued for future years – giving students an opportunity to show their artistic flair and creative talents with wildflowers in floral design.

Lastly, it is recommended that all growers and industry stakeholders are briefed on this project and on the new Floristry Training program so that they can engage with local TAFEs and professional floristry schools to provide product to work with, tours of farms, and any other necessary information that will assist to keep wildflowers as an integral and vital aspect of floristry training into the future.

1. Introduction

In 2000, a RIRDC funded project was completed entitled “Domestic Market Analysis for Wildflowers” by the Australian Flora & Protea Growers Association. This project had the aim of establishing what was needed to improve the domestic profile of wildflowers with the consumer. At that time it was estimated that the wildflowers “market share” was between 5 – 10%. Surveys had found that on the whole most florists were trained at TAFE, where it was felt the nature of training had not changed, covering only traditional and the most basic of floral design information. Many store-owners claimed that apprentices were taught old-fashioned or standard ideas, and not taught to think outside the square or to explore with new products. It was also claimed that the use of wildflowers was not promoted as an integral part of TAFE training. The perception was that student florists were not instructed in how to work with wildflowers in a design sense (i.e. larger flowers, textures), nor were they taught practical considerations (e.g. size of container and water needed, life of wildflowers when combining with other flowers). The study found a lack of awareness of the extensive variety of wildflowers available, together with a general lack of knowledge about ways these flowers could be used. It was noted then that if people don’t know what wildflowers are available, they are not going to want to buy them and florists will not stock them. The recommendations of this project included getting florists educated – both new and experienced.

In 2008, independent surveys of florists have found that whilst there is evidence that the demand for wildflowers has increased marginally, the majority of florists still do not know about or use wildflowers and foliage in their designs. The number of products available from the wildflower industry, including new native foliages, has increased dramatically, however there has not been a flanking education or marketing program to promote to florists and consumers, so awareness and thus demand, remains low. This new project has the aim to rectify the situation with the floristry training program, so that all new students gain both a thorough understanding of wildflowers and foliage, as well as the ability to use them in floral design.

When florists are trained in Australia, whether that is in a local TAFE or in a professional floral design school, they follow a specific training program that is authorised by government for use in registered training organisations. This program to date has not specifically included information on wildflowers, leaving it up to instructors and lecturers to cover the subject as they see fit. As the majority of these teachers are themselves the product of this same training program, their own education on wildflowers and their use in floral design is limited to their own personal desire and drive to obtain information on new products, outside of the school system. It is a chicken and egg situation. The result is that most floral students on completing their training do not know, appreciate or understand our native flora, or how to utilise their unique potential in floral design – reducing the competency of the florist, reducing the availability to the consumer, and reducing demand on the local wildflower market.

2. Aims/Objectives

The aim of this project has been to participate in a review of the floristry training package to overcome current gaps and omissions in the floristry curriculum. The objective is that all future florists trained have the knowledge and understanding of Australian native flowers and foliage, and how they can be used and promoted in the floral industry. The review was already underway by Service Skills Australia (the organisation that manages the development of national training packages for all floristry industry training) when this research and development activity presented as a timely opportunity for the industry to respond – and the newly revised curriculum is to be implemented in 2009/10.

3. Methodology

The first stage of the project was to obtain full information on the existing and currently used floristry training package from Service Skills Australia Pty Ltd and review this thoroughly to determine what needed updating or changing. There were 14 extant modules and each of these was studied in detail and feedback was provided to Service Skills Australia. During this time Service Skills Australia conducted an extensive Australia-wide survey of both professional florists and also registered training organisations providing floristry training. They held workshops in major cities and based on all information and feedback received, they published a detailed 36 page report on Stage One, giving details of what had been found and recommendations for updating the floristry training package.

Three of the four key issues that had been suggested as a result of the above review were endorsed as part of the Stage One report. Feedback was then provided to Service Skills Australia on the Stage One report and its recommendations. The wildflower industry stakeholders were also briefed on progress of the project through the WildFlowers Australia website, as well as through the Australian Floral Industry Magazine.

Service Skills Australia then totally revamped the floristry training package based on the industry and stakeholders feedback – removing duplicate modules, making the competency standards clearer and easier to follow.

A committee was created by Service Skills Australia, consisting of 10 professionals from the floristry industry – made up of reputable TAFE lecturers, national floral designers, the Professional Florist Association and directors of independent floristry schools. Lana Mitchell (uthor of this report) was also invited to these meetings at Service Skills Australia to finalise the exact content of each competency standard. As a result of these meetings Australian grown wildflowers and foliage were specifically added throughout, and many other pertinent issues such as licensing regulations, care, integration of wildflowers with traditional flowers, etc. were included, There was also consultation with WildFlowers Australia board members, as well as Bettina Gollnow, of NSW DPI, and Craig Scott of Eastcoast Wildflowers Pty Ltd, to ensure industry stakeholders were informed on what was being proposed for inclusion, and to give an opportunity for comment or additional content.

The final content of the floristry training package was then made public for comment and feedback in December 2008 and in early 2009 it will be submitted for final authorisation to the Steering Committee and then to the National Quality Council for endorsement. It can then be implemented in registered training organisations Australia-wide in 2010.

Flanking the above, a review was then undertaken of training aids and texts to determine what additional information was needed for the training program. Senior lecturers were surveyed for texts and aids needed and it was found there was no existing text or book listing all the Australian grown wildflowers currently available, nor any compiled information on seasonal availability. A recently published book based on another RIRDC funded project has just been printed (*“Wildflowers From Australia”*) will fill this need and can be made available nationally at low cost. Service Skills Australia also produces a User Guide and two text books to accompany their training package. Detailed information pertinent to the additions and changes to the training program was provided so that when these are updated in mid 2009 they dovetail with the new floristry training program. This will give lecturers/teachers and also every student information specific to wildflowers for their use in floristry.

4. Detailed results

Specific changes/additions to the floristry training program as a result of this project are:

A. To date the training program did not mention wildflowers. The units simply stated “fresh flowers” and it was up to the lecturer to make sure a broad range of flowers and foliage were studied and used as part of the student’s training. This has now changed. There are 13 units specifically detailing floristry and these units are entitled:

- *“Source information on floristry products and components”*
- *“Receive, store and care for floristry stock and merchandise”*
- *“Merchandise products”* (imported unit from other retail training packages)
- *“Provide quality service to floristry customers”*
- *“Sell floristry products”*
- *“Prepare quotations for floristry products”*
- *“Research, assess and develop a floristry product range”*
- *“Establish and conduct business relationships”* (imported unit from other retail training packages)
- *“Explore the use of colour”* (imported unit)
- *“Produce drawings to represent and communicate the concept”* (imported)
- *“Interpret and respond to a design brief”* (imported)
- *“Conceive floristry products”*
- *“Design floristry products”*
- *“Style and manage an event”*
- *“Research global design trends”* (imported)
- *“Assemble floristry products”*
- *“Construct hand tied floristry products”*
- *“Construct wired floristry products”*
- *“Construct floristry products with a base medium”*

Each of these units includes a performance criteria, as well as required skills and knowledge, a range statement and an evidence guide for the lecturer/teacher. The range statement in each of these units details what “flower and plant materials” includes when it is stated in a unit. The range statements for all units now specifically states:

- *“flowers including:*
 - *fresh (traditional, exotic and Australian)*

- *dry and preserved*
- *artificial*
- *plant materials including:*
 - *fresh (exotic and Australian foliage)*
 - *dry*
 - *artificial*
 - *fruit and vegetables”*

This means that as part of teaching each unit, a lecturer/teacher must see that the student can use both traditional, exotic and also Australian flowers and foliage – and they must have evidence that they are competent at such.

- B. The unit “*Source Information on Floristry Products and Components*” is a basic unit studied by all students. This unit focuses on the development of product knowledge required to fulfil any sales and operational need (the design, care, construction and sales of floristry products). It is a pre-requisite to many other units and it requires the ability to identify appropriate information sources and to research, develop and maintain a product knowledge base relevant to the industry sector and job role.

Specific additions made to this unit were:

- *Sourcing product from local, domestic and international sources (learning about the impact on price, quality, selection and environmental impact when choosing where to source product from). This includes information on impact of fumigation on vase life of imported flowers.*
- *Integration of Australian grown wildflowers and foliage with traditional and exotic flora.*
- *Seasonal availability of Australian grown wildflowers and foliages.*
- *Licensing requirements for protected Australian wildflowers and foliages, and how these relate to a florist and to retail sales.*

- C. A further basic unit that all floristry students must study is “*Receive, Store and Care for Floristry Stock and Merchandise*”. This unit describes the performance outcomes, skills and knowledge required to receive and store all types of floristry stock including flower and plant materials, agents used for their conditioning and care, ancillary merchandise and wrapping and packaging materials. It requires the ability to check and take delivery of floristry stock and to appropriately store, rotate and maintain the quality of all stock items including the conditioning and care of flower and plant materials. The quality care of floristry stock requires the ability to maintain the cleanliness of all stock handling, storage and display areas to avoid spoilage of stock.

Specific additions made to this unit were:

- *Following supplier and grower instructions on care and maintenance procedures for specific flora and foliage.*
- *Cleanliness of buckets for storage of flowers and foliage.*

- ***Information on care of Australian grown wildflowers and foliage so as to maintain quality and extend vase life.***

D. As part of the training package, Service Skills Australia publishes a User Guide, detailing industry requirements for implementing the Floristry Training Package. This publication is for lecturers and teachers in registered training organisations – providing a series of “good practice” fact sheets that identify and explain key floristry industry objectives in skills and knowledge development. These fact sheets also contain suggested tools and ideas to assist employers, registered training organisations, assessors and trainers work with the training package and develops graduates who are ready for the industry. Key points that are to be included in the new User Guide for the new floristry training package are:

- ***That graduates are work ready and have a solid product knowledge and the ability to use a broad range of products in floral design, including traditional, exotic and also Australian grown wildflowers and foliage.***
- ***That graduates are encouraged to source material that is Australian grown, both to obtain fresher products with longer vase life, as well as support local industry and promote native flora.***
- ***That graduates understand how to care for flowers (including wildflowers), and practise this and also promote this information to customers so as to obtain the best vase life and therefore build their reputation/business for high quality products.***

E. As the final part of the implementation of the training package, Service Skills Australia publishes two text books – one for Certificate Two Floristry “**Working in Floristry**” and the other for Certificate Three Floristry “**Floristry Techniques**”. As part of this project these texts were thoroughly reviewed and information was provided to the authors/editors so that when these are reprinted in 2009 they will include all up-to-date information on Australian grown wildflowers and foliage, and so that students can be provided with a workbook that they can use in their studies and then take into the workplace for vital information pertaining to the industry.

Information to be included in these text books includes key references to websites for detailed information on Australian grown wildflowers and foliage, including seasonal availability, colours, botanical names, care, use of product with other flowers, as well as design tips. Also included will be key legislation from National Parks and Wildlife Services on the sale of protected flowers/plants, as well as information on where to get wholesale wildflowers and foliage so they can fill requests from customers. Basic information on care of flowers to maintain maximum vase life, as well as ethylene sensitivity of some flowers is also included.

F. In addition to the corrections to the individual floristry training modules that make up the floristry training program, and the inclusion of information on wildflowers and the industry in the User Guide and two accompanying texts, it is vital that a comprehensive list of Australian grown wildflowers and foliage is made available to students in every TAFE and college. This list would include high quality photos, details on seasonal availability, as well as botanic names and common names. This resource became recently available through the Australian Flower Export Council as part of a RIRDC funded project, and was surveyed as much needed and wanted by floristry teachers/lecturers, as well as students themselves.

5. Implications

As a result of this new training package, all Australian students from 2010 will graduate with a firm knowledge base and the ability to use Australian grown wildflowers in floral design. This should increase the popularity of wildflowers with consumers across Australia, and also increase demand down to grower level and encourage the use of Australian wildflowers and foliage on an international scale.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations of this project are:

- a) That the newly revised Floristry Training Program as developed by Service Skills Australia is supported and promoted.
- b) That the accompanying User Guide and text books are promoted and made popular with all floristry students for pertinent and relevant information on the industry.
- c) That the recently published booklet “*Wildflowers From Australia*” is used as a resource for all TAFE colleges/professional floristry schools and all students to give comprehensive information on the diverse range of products available to the domestic cut-flower market.
- d) That the existing National Floristry Training Competition, run by WildFlowers Australia and offered to all TAFEs and professional floristry schools is continued for future years – giving students an opportunity to show their artistic flair and creative talents with wildflowers in floral design.
- e) Lastly, it is recommended that all growers and industry stakeholders are briefed on this project and on the new Floristry Training program so that they can engage with local TAFEs and professional floristry schools to provide product to work with, tours of farms, and any other needed information that will assist to keep wildflowers as an integral and vital aspect of floristry training into the future.

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RIRDC Publication No. 09/119

By Lana Mitchell

Australian grown wildflowers make up approximately 10% of the domestic cut-flower market – with traditional and exotic flowers being the mainstay of the cut-flower industry. Surveys of existing florists find that many do not know what wildflowers or foliage are available, or how to use or care for them in floral design.

The aim of this project was to facilitate the inclusion of Australian wildflowers and native plants in the training of floral design students in Australia -- both in terms of basic product information as well as care and use of Australian native flora in floral design.

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