Product: Hinchinbrook banksia, Silver banksia
Botanical name: Banksia plagiocarpa
**Banksia plagiocarpa** is a relative newcomer to floristry.

It originates in the tropical coastal area of northern Queensland (Hinchinbrook Island and the mainland nearby). The flowers are typically metallic grey to bluish grey, but may also be yellowish.

Each cylindrical to conical flower head is composed of hundreds of tiny individual florets arranged in vertical rows. Each flower head is fully open when the pin-like styles are all sticking out. However, the market generally prefers fully formed flower heads with a rounded top and no florets yet open.

Immature cones (or candles), fully formed flower heads and the woody cones that follow can all be marketed. The foliage is very attractive, with both leaves and stems densely covered with rusty red hairs. It can be marketed as a separate product, in sleeved bunches of 5 stems.

There is some variability between grower selections. Those with superior flower forms and colours, straighter stems and a lesser tendency to produce bypass shoots should be grown in preference to others. A stronger focus on grading is needed to maintain prices and demand.

The flower head is easily damaged, so careful handling and packing are important.

Owing to its tropical origin, Banksia plagiocarpa tolerates high summer rainfall but seems to be adaptable to a range of climates. Adequate water and fertiliser are needed for good-quality flowers and foliage. It is very sensitive to high phosphorus levels, which can result in severe iron chlorosis symptoms in the leaves, spoiling presentation at market entry, and even plant death.

Young growing tips may suffer damage and distortion from tiny bud mites, which will have long since disappeared by the time the deformed and twisted leaves become apparent. However, such damage can alarm quarantine inspectors in some overseas markets.

**More than 1 flower head may form at the tip of a stem. Secondary blooms should be carefully removed when they are young.**

This banksia is prone to developing bypass shoots near the bloom at the stem tip; these should be removed when they are small, because trimming them around harvest time results in unsightly stubs on the flowering stem.

**Flowering season:**
February to October, with peak flowering in April to June. Some flowers are available throughout the year.

**Typical vase life:**
28 days.

Export can reduce the vase life, especially if the transport conditions are not cold, the product dries out, or transport takes too long.

**Other products to which this specification can be generally applied:**
Other Banksia species, such as B. robur.

*This specification also applies to Banksia robur.*
Product: Hinchinbrook banksia, Silver banksia

STAGES OF OPENING

The stages shown apply to the product at market entry. Pay attention to the weather, time of year, and mode and duration of transport, because the flowers will continue to open during transport. You must consult with your target market to ensure that the flowers arrive at the desired stage.

Stage 1
Immature stage (‘candle’): unacceptable to markets

Stage 2
Slightly immature stage (tip of bloom still pointed) – early harvest stage, preferred by only a few markets

COMMON DEFECTS

Common defects to be avoided at market entry:
- Deformed or asymmetrical flower heads
- Damaged flower heads
- Distorted, dried or damaged leaves
- Poorly coloured foliage due to nutritional deficiency
- Borer holes
- Dried out flower heads
- Flower heads too small
- Bypass shoots or secondary flower heads
- Bent stem or flower head offset
Stage 3
Prime stage to market:
tip of bloom is fully swollen; flower purplish (not green)

Stage 4
Ready to market (latest stage):
mainly for domestic market; top of flower head flattening

Stage 5
Overmature stage:
unaccepted by many markets

Borer damage – discard
Bent bloom – discard
Ugly stubs
Head offset from stem, ugly stubs at base of bloom – discard
All leaves stripped – do not market
Dried out flower head – do not market
Leaves deformed by bud mites – discard
Poor foliage colour
### FLOWERS

**Appearance**
- Bluish grey rather than green.
- Flower head fully formed and at final size.
- Size (diameter) and length must be proportional to stem length.
- No bypass shoots or secondary blooms.
- Flower head follows in a straight line from the stem (and is not offset from the stem at more than 15°).

**When to harvest**
- Flower head fully formed, with the top rounded rather than pointed, and no styles reflexed (export and domestic markets).
- Avoid harvesting when flowers are wet.

**Damage**
- No asymmetrical, deformed or damaged blooms.

**Contamination**
- Product free of grit and soil, weeds or weed seeds, living or dead insects, and signs of insects or spiders, such as webbing.

**Pests and diseases**
- No insects, insect damage or disease.

### LEAVES

**Appearance**
- Fresh and crisp.
- Not dull or wilted.
- Minimum discoloration (<2% by area and affecting <10% of leaves); no yellowing.

**At harvest**
- Remove leaves from the lower 10–15 cm, or half, of the stem.

**Damage**
- Minimum evidence of pests, disease or other blemishes, such as mechanical damage. Leaves entire (no insect feeding damage).
- No spiders or spider webs.
- Free of visible chemical residues.

### STEMS

**Appearance**
- Rigid and strong enough to support blooms, without being too heavy and bulky.
- Bend <15°.
- Free of disfiguring trim marks or other blemishes.
- Neatly cut end.

**Length**
- According to market demand.

### RECOMMENDED HANDLING AT HARVEST

Minimise drying out and exposure to heat – pick when it is cool, preferably straight into buckets of clean potable water, and hold in the shade.

Move cut stems promptly to a cool, shaded packing area and cool quickly.

Hold stems in clean water in a high-humidity cool room (95%) at 2–4°C as soon as possible. Hold for at least 4 hours, and preferably overnight, before processing.

### GRADING AND BUNCHING

**Grading**
- Flowers are generally marketed as single stems.
- Reject any contaminated stems.
- Sort stems according to length and thickness: flower head proportional to stem length (typically 20% to 25% of the total stem length for larger blooms). Market smaller heads on shorter stems.

**Bunching**
- Smaller flowers may be bunched in 5s with a single tie.

**Stem length**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem length (cm)</th>
<th>Length of flower head (cm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>18–20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>70</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Typical bunches look like this.*
Effecting cooling soon after harvest is important to retaining quality and maximising vase life. There are two options:

- Cool, process, cool – for example, remove field heat by cooling flowers immediately on entry into shed to 10 °C in buckets of solution, process flowers (bunch, grade), and then cool to 2–4 °C by either forced-air cooling (ifboxed) or holding overnight in a cool room.

- Process within 1 hour of cutting, and then cool to 2–4 °C by either forced-air cooling for 20–30 minutes (if boxed) or holding overnight in a cool room (if in buckets). Forced-air cooling of packed flowers is ideal for large volumes of product.

Hold in a high-humidity cool room (95%) at 2–4 °C. Another way of achieving high humidity is to cover the flowers with plastic sleeves or plastic sheeting.

Use high-quality potable water. Postharvest solution: Hold in high-quality potable water with an added chlorine biocide registered for postharvest use in cut flowers. Avoid sugar as this stimulates more nectar production, which can lead to problems with botrytis. Holding solution: Hold at 2–4 °C for up to 4 days.

For longer storage seek professional advice and test in the market before committing product.