

Chelsea Flower Show 1997 — Planning and Perseverance

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INTRODUCTION

The Chelsea Flower Show, London (officially The Royal Horticultural Society Great Spring Show), is the world's most prestigious horticultural event. Chelsea attracts 170,000 visitors from all around the world, and involves another 30,000 exhibitors, contractors, and officials.

Kings Park and Botanic Garden initiated the project as a tourism and promotional event for Western Australia. It became reality when support was promised from the Flower Export Council of Australia for cut flowers, and links to a week of Western Australia product in London (Good Living — Western Australia) by the Department of Commerce and Trade provided sponsorship from John Brown Engineering and British Airways.

Linda Lukies, of Flowers & Studio, Mosman Park was invited to join Roger Fryer, Curator — Technical Services, and Grady Brand, Curator — Collections and Displays, to implement the design. Using Western Australian wildflowers, the design showed a south west swamp in contrast to the arid interior on the two sides of a sand dune representing the two faces of Western Australia.

All hard landscape materials were transported from Perth inside a sea container and plants and cut flowers were flown over. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, assisted by providing glasshouse space and staff to assist with the set up and take down of the display. Phytosanitary reasons prevented us from returning plants used in the display, so these were donated to Kew. They have established a post-Chelsea display, using our plants, labels, and signs, that attracted considerable public attention.

PLANNING

Planning began 18 months out and involved display design and logistical planning. Factors influencing these were plant and cut flower selection and availability, U.K. import restrictions, and Australian export restrictions. Transport methods as well as the design requirements for artefacts and their source, signage, pamphlets, and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) restrictions for the display and associated signs and labels were all considered.

PLANT IMPORT AND PHYTOSANITARY PROCEDURES

Contact with the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) and the United Kingdom Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery, and Food (MAFF) provided a prohibited species list for guidance. Plant selection was made 12 months in advance based on those species flowering at the correct time and relating to design requirements.

Design requirements to take both potted and cut flower material together meant that we had to meet phytosanitary requirements and export licences for importing plants in potting mix into the U.K.

We met these by:

- 1) Ensuring no plants were on the prohibited species list, Solanaceae and Gramineae were the problem families.
- 2) Proposed treatments and plant lists were faxed to AQIS and MAFF for comment.
- 3) AQIS inspected the plants 7 days prior to export and advised on problems and treatment. The formal inspection was made 2 days prior to export to allow time for packing.
- 4) All documentation was faxed in advance to MAFF to allow time to check and assimilate before the plants arrived.
- 5) We obtained export licences through the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) and the WA Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) for all plants. Application for plant licences need to be made at least 6 weeks prior to export. Botanical descriptions were required for species which did not occur on the ANCA database.
- 6) We met CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) requirements because all plants were propagated and cultivated in Kings Park nursery.

PLANT GROWING

Plants were grown hydroponically and by normal container methods. We applied strict hygiene in both cases. Larger plants were bare rooted, washed, and repotted into a pasteurised potting medium.

LANDSCAPE MATERIALS — IMPORT PROCEDURES

Landscape materials such as sand, timber, and rocks were dealt with in a similar fashion to the plants. The appropriate authorities in the U.K., e.g., MAFF and Forestry Commission, were notified in advance and clarification was sought for fumigation and hygiene requirements. These vary depending on the type and source of the material.

AIR FREIGHT

We approached our freight forwarder, AEI (both for sea and air freight) and British Airways to decide best transport options. For both companies this was a first time to transport potted plants in an air container, new methods and procedures had to be devised. Large volumes of freight need booking several months in advance to ensure space was available.

Over 350 plants ranging from 2.5 m high to 20 cm high were packed into an air container 4 m 5 2 m 5 1.5 m high using a tiered decking arrangement. Large plants were laid flat on the base and any gaps between branches filled with smaller plants. Pine legs were inserted between the plants and a plywood decking was installed. Hessian was stapled to the boards, brought up, and stapled around the plant pots as they were packed, to prevent them moving.

A second deck was installed and the remainder of the plants, boxes of pamphlets, and seeds were stacked on this. Edging strips were installed to ensure plants and boxes could not fall off.

The air container was loaded Wednesday morning, left Perth that afternoon, and we unpacked it at Kew late on Friday, 61 h later. Nearly all plants arrived in good condition, only three were damaged physically and had to be discarded.

The plants grown hydroponically were sealed in "Gro Fresh" bags. This should have allowed ethylene to disperse, but ten of the *Swainsona maccullochiana* suffered damage from ethylene build up that affected flower development after arrival.

Cut flowers were provided through the Flower Export Council of Australia (FECA) and were flown over separately. They were handled by Total Flower Exports as a standard export procedure. These were sent on the Thursday and delivered on the Friday evening, 13 h after landing.

SEA FREIGHT

Approximately 11 m³ of hard landscape material, a dry blower, tools, and construction materials were packed onto pallets, shrink wrapped, and sent sea freight in containers. All material arrived in good condition apart from a few damaged bags of sand. In the U.K. it took 10 days for the pallets to clear customs and be delivered. There were some problems over a Value Added Tax (VAT) number but on the whole this was a relatively smooth operation.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew gardens were used as a staging area for the plants and display material and they also provided staff to assist with set up and take down. We were able to work on the plant material in good glasshouses for 5 days which helped to get the kinks from the packing out of most of them. Without this area it would not be possible to transport many of the softer plants and have them in display condition. Kew provided two staff and a supervisor for the first day and two or three staff for the rest of the set up time. Without their assistance it would not have been possible to set up in time.

In planning for set up we organised tools, sand, etc. to be delivered on site in sequence and for the plant transport from Kew to the Chelsea site. Water, power, and lighting were all organised in advance.

SWAN SONG

After the display we donated the plants to Kew and they set up a post Chelsea display in the Princess of Wales glasshouse using surplus red sand, our labels, and the "Plants supplied by Kings Park, Perth W. Australia" signs we had. This gives Kings Park and Botanic Garden an ongoing display and maintains our links with Kew. (Ed's note: The Black Swan is an integral part of Western Australia's coat of arms).

CONCLUSION

While this was an expensive project both financially and in staff involvement the returns were enormous. Benefits included:

- 1) Very good publicity here and in the U.K., with potential for ongoing support from local radio stations.
- 2) International credibility of our horticulture standards and our ability to deliver.
- 3) Closer links to Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the RHS, and Edinburgh Botanic Garden.
- 4) Potentially increased exports of wildflowers to the U.K.
- 5) Potentially increased visitor numbers to WA and Kings Park and Botanic Gardens.

- 6) Increased confidence of our staff in their abilities.
- 7) Increased staff knowledge in display work and horticulture generally.
- 8) Closer ties to the commercial side of horticulture in Perth and increased support from the industry.
- 9) Giving Kings Park and Botanic Garden a worldwide view.

Despite all the restrictions and complications of international export and import, if good hygiene and horticultural practices are followed, this exercise proved that container plants can be transported and displayed in good condition. Whether it is commercially viable is another matter.

My Knowledge

George Lullfitz

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My knowledge has been acquired over many years by practical experience and with some assistance in the early years from special people who were pioneers in their field. Fred Lullfitz and Charles Gardiner were my earliest mentors. Later inspiration in nursery practices was gained from George Gay, Ben Swane, and Jack Pike. I have been associated with the growing and promotion of Western Australian native plants for 35 years and a member of the I.P.P.S. since 1972.

Through my knowledge and experience it has been possible to introduce new plant cultivars into local, national, and international horticulture with application to nurseries, landscaping, and floriculture (cut flowers). Some recognition for my contributions made to the WA flora and horticulture has been the inclusion of the name Lullfitz in the species of some recently named plants. These new selections have come about through:

- Careful observation of plants in nurseries and local and natural environments,
- Having the ability to recognise potential for something out of the ordinary, e.g., mutations, flowering times, hybrids.
- Specialist selection and propagation experience.

Good new cultivars are highly sought after. But in the past the person who had put in years of hard work to get a new cultivar into cultivation was not adequately remunerated. So here is my accumulated knowledge, distilled into four points of advice to those of you investing considerable amounts of time and money to research and develop new plant selections:

- Identify your opportunities, if you have something worthwhile do something with it!
- Be aware of threats, someone else may somehow obtain your idea or product. So use it or, sadly, potentially lose it!
- Capitalise on your knowledge, make sure that you are the one rewarded for your efforts.
- Protect your knowledge, through Plant Breeders Rights, propagation agreements, etc., and you can continue to prosper from your investment.