

Marketing Australian Plants Internationally

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WHO ARE KOALA BLOOMS?

Koala Blooms is an Australian-owned company which markets Australian plants internationally. Koala Blooms was formed in 1989 as a result of marketing research undertaken in Europe and U.S.A.

The following aspects highlighted the need for Koala Blooms to be formed:

- 1) Demand existed worldwide for plants new to the horticultural industry
- 2) Australian plants had proved successful in overseas markets but foreign companies were involved, with little or no return for the Australian horticultural industry
- 3) There was no Australian company to develop and market Australian plants as export products.
- 4) The international image of Australia was positive and advantageous in marketing Australian plants.
- 5) There was not much cultural knowledge on Australian plants as propagation and growing protocols were not provided.

Koala Blooms was set up to provide a structure enabling Australian plants to be marketed in international markets by Australians, with benefits flowing back to the Australian horticultural industry. We work jointly with breeders, nurseries, Australian plant enthusiasts and are in the process of having discussions with various university research departments.

MARKETING STRATEGY OF KOALA BLOOMS

Koala Blooms has a marketing philosophy of maintaining control of plant products via brand names and patents which inherently identify plants as of Australian origin. The brand names are *Koala Blooms* and *Outback Plants*. This is a novel concept for the nursery industry overseas and has met with intrigue, interest, and enthusiasm in the U.S.A. It is paramount for ultimate control of a plant's position in the marketplace and the protection of benefits returning to Australia.

Successful plants selected by Koala Blooms are protected (if eligible) by Koala Blooms on behalf of the breeder/introducer under Plant Breeders Rights or similar legislation overseas.

TYPES OF PLANTS MARKETED

There are two distinct programmes:

- Herbaceous plants.
- Woody plants.

These two groupings have distinctive nursery production times. Herbaceous plants are ready for sale within 8 to 16 weeks from potting-on as liners or tubestock. Woody stock production time is extended—varies from around 25 weeks to 18 months.

Koala Blooms herbaceous selections include *Anigozanthos*, *Brachycome*, *Bracteantha*, *Chrysocephalum*, *Rhodanthe*, *Scaevola*, *Viola*, and strange as it may

seem, *Pandorea* which fits into this category. The woody group includes *Astartea*, *Bauera*, *Beaufortia*, *Callistemon*, *Calytrix*, *Chamelaucium*, *Chorizema*, *Dampiera*, *Derwentia*, *Hardenbergia*, *Kunzea*, *Lechenaultia*, *Leucophyta*, *Leptospermum*, *Olearia*, *Pimelea*, *Prostanthera*, *Syzygium*, *Telopea*, *Thryptomene*, and *Westringia*.

KOALA BLOOMS AUSTRALIAN OPERATIONS

We are always seeking new plants from breeders, growers, and enthusiasts for introduction into our programmes, but we have strict criteria to enable them to reach the stage of being marketed overseas.

Plant Selection Criteria. The product attributes should be aimed at marketable features.

- Uniqueness—needs to be different, but if too different nurseries are often reticent to grow it.
- Size—must be fitted into a nursery production program to get marketed. In the U.S.A. 1-gal size dominates the market but 4- and 6-inch pots as well as flats are now more common.
- Appearance of the plant in a pot is paramount.
- Degree of flower production and flower size—big is not necessarily best!
- Flowering period longevity. Many Australian plants in the herbaceous program flower for an extremely long period which has impressed many overseas growers.
- Plant longevity. This covers transportability and presentation at garden centres. Consumers have different perceptions on longevity. For Chicago 2 to 4 months is usually adequate, as outdoor plants are bought for spring and summer display, whereas in California gardeners expect 2 to 5 years or more.

Nursery Propagation and Growing Trials. We thoroughly monitor response to nursery production in the areas of propagation and growing as container plants in a range of different trials.

Garden Cultivation Trials. Ease of growing in gardens. Response to varied conditions and locations is examined over 1 to 2 years or more. Often the introducer has also trialed the plants for an extensive period.

EXPORT

Ease of Preparation for Shipment Overseas. Rooted cuttings or seedlings usually must be transported bare-rooted. Some plants are very easy to prepare, such as *Brachycome*, whereas *Bracteantha* and some of the woody species or selections are more time consuming. Some plants are damaged more easily than others when preparing them for shipping.

Reaction to Exportation. Often soft-foliaged plants or those with brittle roots can suffer. Tissue-culture material poses the least problems, as long as they can be kept in an upright position while in transit! We have had some very expensive disasters involving shipping from Australia and now personally escort mother-stock as certified cabin hand-luggage. This has overcome many of the problems in

transportation. During inspection procedures by overseas Agricultural Departments we are always in attendance in case any emergency issues arise.

KOALA BLOOMS OPERATIONS IN THE U.S.A.

Propagation and Growing Trials. These are initially undertaken at our head propagator's nursery in California. When plants are distributed to our other licensed propagators they also undertake trials. Detailed propagation and growing protocols prepared by Koala Blooms are provided for all plant introductions into the U.S.A. Regular visits are made to our head propagator and other licensed nurseries by Koala Blooms Australian staff.

The results of these trials indicate which plants are to be marketed in the U.S.A. and into which marketing program they are to be placed.

Quality control of propagation stock is of paramount importance. Whenever possible propagation stock is regularly renewed through tissue culture and also virus-testing procedures are undertaken.

Koala Blooms Program. This brand is directed to independent garden centres and is based on licensed growers, who are fully trained to grow our plants correctly. It represents over 135 plant cultivars now firmly established in the U.S.A.

- Licensed propagators undertake production for sale of liners or plugs to licensed growers or in some cases the growers are also the propagators of selected plants.
- There is a limited number of selected licensed growers who then sell finished stock to licensed garden centres.

Outback Plants Program. This brand is directed to mass merchants and is based on exposure and availability to over 4500 U.S. wholesale growers. It represents a current product line of 26 plants which are relatively easy, as well as quick, to grow. All plants are packaged into marketing programmes which utilise a colourful logo, labelling, point of sale material, and promotional activities.

The Outback Plants Program has been a most difficult undertaking but one of which we are very proud of, as Koala Blooms has created the only plant marketing structure specialising in our country's native plants, with Australians, and resulting in benefits flowing to Australia and especially the Australian horticultural industry.

Licensed Propagators. Currently we have three licensed propagators. Our head propagator is at Fresno, California, with other propagators in Washington State and Florida. This will be expanded shortly to include propagators in the northeast and mid-west regions of the U.S.A. as well as in Canada.

Brokers. Plant sales to mass merchants operate differently in the U.S.A. to here in Australia. A broker system is used and we are working with 15 brokers including the four largest in the country. The brokers seek sales of Outback Plants products from the wholesale growers and the orders are placed with the licensed propagators who then supply liners or plugs to growers. The growers are then free to sell the plants to any mass merchant they wish. All plants are supplied with a special Outback Plants label by the propagator. A royalty to Koala Blooms is incorporated in the label cost, which enables marketing promotion and payment of a royalty to the original introducer in Australia.

Promotion. Wherever possible we aim to have the Koala Blooms and Outback Plants brand names and products brought before the nursery industry, landscape industry, and home gardener.

Print Media. We have had invitations to submit articles, which have been subsequently published, in trade magazines such as Greenhouse Grower, Grower Talks, and Greenhouse Manager. We submit articles and press releases to trade magazines. Articles for home gardening magazines are also prepared.

Electronic Media. We have had limited access to radio gardening shows but these have been extremely successful when we were doing trial releases. There are invitations to be involved in more of radio programmes as the plants become more readily available on a wider market. There is also the possibility of TV exposure, now that things are really beginning to happen with the first major release via mass merchants occurring as I talk to you.

Ohio Short Course. In July this year we will have a stand at the prime Horticultural Industry Show in the U.S.A. Brokers and growers from all over northern America with some visitors and exhibitors from overseas view attendance at this show as a must. Koala Blooms will be there with an eye-catching display of current and future releases.

KOALA BLOOMS OPERATIONS IN EUROPE AND JAPAN

Negotiations are being undertaken with brokers and growers in both of these regions for the introduction of the Outback Plants Program. Propagation and growing trials will begin as soon as agreements are finalised.

CONCLUSION

After 6 years of concentrated effort and often including many disheartening times, Koala Blooms believe they can now offer a wonderful opportunity for the Australian horticultural industry to have Australian native plants marketed overseas as an Australian product which will in return provide royalties for breeders/introducers in Australia. Please do not hesitate to make contact with us. As a result of this success overseas Koala Blooms is also releasing a range of plants in Australia from spring this year.