



Wafex partner Craig Musson with 'Sarah's Delight' in the field

Helix Australia is a relatively new member of NGIV and among the licensed propagators of their new PBR waxflower lines are some notable industry participants including Greenhills Propagation Nursery in Victoria, Benara Nurseries in Western Australia and Native Plant Wholesalers in South Australia.

Helix Australia has identified the nursery and landscape industries as having been starved for new and improved waxflower hybrids and will invest over the coming years to raise the profile and application of this stunning and under-utilised Australian native genus.

Since its inception Helix has put together an exciting range of new waxflower varieties including 'My Sweet Sixteen', 'Dancing Queen', 'Chantilly Lace', 'Sarah's Delight', 'Moonlight Delight' and 'Raspberry Ripple'.

Adrian commented: "Waxflower is a very popular landscape plant but over the last 10 or 15 years it hasn't seen a lot in terms of new varieties. Long term standards include 'Purple Pride' (bred by George Lullfitz in the 1970s), 'Wanneroo', 'Lady Stephanie' and 'Mullering Brook'."

"Now we've come into that nursery space and got a very good response," Adrian said.

"The new varieties bring new forms including bigger flowers, bigger buds and new colours. 'Sweet Sixteen' for example is unusual because it's a bi-colour starting off white, then it turns red – so you've got a mix of red and white – then it finishes its flowering cycle all red, which is pretty amazing."

"Flowering times – early flowering, late flowering, but mainly new colours – that's where the existing native plant growers have gone, 'this needs a kick – excitement and innovation'.

"The drought period was a busy time for native plant sales and when Helix started we were still in drought so interest levels were still high. Hardy? Definitely tick that box. Low water needs? Definitely tick that box. It's seasonal colour with late winter to spring flowering."

"So, we have the two channels – selling into the cut flower market, producing cut flowers not just in Australia. Helix has agreements in place in South Africa and Israel and California to produce waxflower – either at different times of the year to Australia or for geographical reasons. That's one channel where Helix is putting its new varieties.

The other channel is obviously the nursery industry with tubegrowers and major nurseries. Helix is doing its own marketing – "laying the base, building relationships, getting into the new industry". For Adrian, who started in the industry 20 years ago at retail level, it is something of a return.

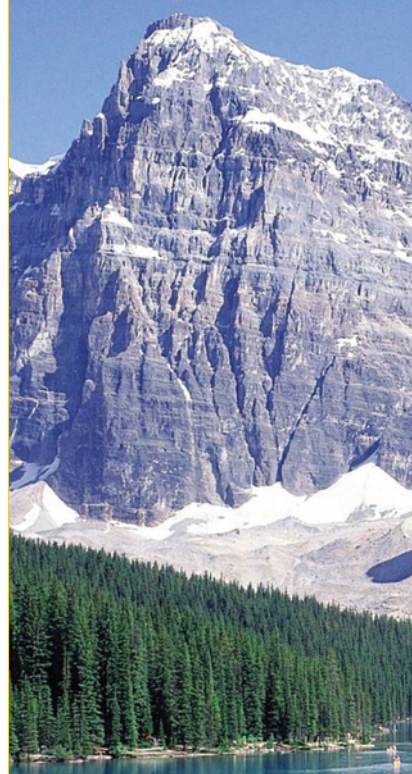
There are also developments beyond waxflowers. The company bought a flower farm in Victoria's Gippsland last year and in doing so inherited a RIRDC-funded *Leptospermum* breeding program run in conjunction with DPI Victoria.

"This is quite a nice tie-in with waxflower – it's a native, a 'filler' flower at cut flower level, and it has similar landscape applications."

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