

## Introducing Foreign Woody Species to Australia and Associated Marketing Techniques

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### INTRODUCTION

Australia's geographic remoteness is a magnificent bonus for plant-lovers, with very few serious diseases and protected by stringent quarantine regulations. Despite its hot and dry climate, most foreign woody species introduced into Australia seem to thrive and adapt themselves well to the environment.

Without compromising the unique beauty of Australian native plants, they tend to be relatively short-lived and spindly in growth habit. Whilst being well-adapted to Australia's rather harsh conditions, "natives" are generally "poor performers", having great degrees of variability. This could be attributed to inbreeding.

Most Australian native trees are currently propagated from seed and possess self-incompatibility systems and partially or completely reject their own pollen. We are all aware that genetic diversity is needed to produce healthy vigorous progeny and research is currently underway into methods of strongly out-breeding Australian native trees to produce superior cultivars.

Despite eucalyptus trees constantly shedding their leaves year-round, Australian native plants are not deciduous and, therefore, do not have the striking brilliance of autumn colors. The gum tree is indeed at its striking best in the more natural surroundings of parklands, forests, and Australian bushland.

Australia also has the problem, and the tendency, of drought and bushfire and indeed many of the "native" species require fire to regenerate. Exotic woody species tend to "slow" a fire's progression and it is not unusual to see surrounding bushland devastated by fire with a home remaining unburnt surrounded by introduced foreign species.

Australia thus has the need to import exotic species and new and exciting foreign species are much sought after in Australia.

Because of Australia's geographic remoteness and freedom of many of the pests and diseases prevalent in other countries, Australian authorities are indeed most stringent in their quarantine laws.

### INTRODUCING FOREIGN 'WOODY' SPECIES TO AUSTRALIA

After obtaining the necessary import permit, all nursery stock entering Australia must be approved and inspected by the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) where they are confined for a period, depending upon the genus, species, and degree of risk.

Plants usually fall into three risk categories:

**High Risk—3 Years+ Confinement.** Plants in this group are more likely to carry exotic pests and diseases and could ultimately affect important agricultural crops. Sometimes the confinement time can be reduced if the material has been obtained from an "approved" source, such as Prosser IR2, Washington (e.g., *Pyrus* and *Malus*, as Australia is currently free of fireblight). All high-risk material is quarantined in

an AQIS post-entry nursery for the required time frame and indexing procedures.

**Medium Risk—3 Months to 2 Years Confinement.** Generally, this category covers ornamentals and bulbs and enters either the Australian Quarantine post-entry nursery or private screen house where they are examined for their potential to host any disease, such as Dutch Elm disease (*Ulmus* and *Prunus* as Australia is free of Dutch Elm disease and Plum Pox).

**Low Risk—Subject to Certain Conditions, no Post-Entry Quarantine is Necessary.** Plants that are not considered to host serious pests or diseases and includes tissue cultures of medium-risk plants and elite stock from high health accredited sources.

Quarantine costs can be quite expensive, especially with the high-risk-type imports, with costs ranging from A\$900 to A\$3500 if heat treatment is necessary. Australian Quarantine is operated on a “User Pays” system.

## MARKETING TECHNIQUES IN AUSTRALIA

Promotion and marketing within Australia needs careful consideration because of the varying climatic conditions, especially areas where there is extreme heat stress levels. Overall, winters are relatively mild, especially when compared to those in the United States, and as a result Australia does not generally experience winter damage.

After Plant Breeders’ Rights and/or trademarking protections are obtained, promotion and marketing takes place. Australia has two major national gardening magazines and two national television programs, as well as various leisure programs. Consumers, Australia-wide, can be inspired by wholesalers and retailers whose product is featured on the television programs, without the wholesaler or retailer incurring the prohibitive costs of direct advertising.

Likewise, the majority of the public can be reached by either advertising in the gardening magazines, or submitting editorials for publication.

Fleming’s Nurseries have developed an extremely adept technique of marketing their product which encompasses the use of an extensive and informative private photographic library. This photographic library is invaluable for the following reasons:

- An up-to-date reference.
- Are an integral part of our catalogue.
- Sets our product apart from other products by way of an “exclusive”, distinct, and informative label.
- Are the source behind our posters and other promotional material, such as the back cover of gardening magazines.
- Are available to garden centers for their own use.

Fleming’s Nurseries have successfully marketed “public” cultivars by the unique approach of an “umbrella” trademark (e.g., Indian Summer<sup>TM</sup>)—The Dream Tree series of “public” *Lagerstroemias* from Washington Arboretum. These *Lagerstroemia* cultivars bear the names of American Indian nations and were marketed under this trademark, with outstanding success in Australia.

In addition to the above, in recent times, Fleming’s Nurseries has adopted another approach to advertising, whereby we now advertise direct to the consumer, especially for the exclusively licensed species.

Fleming's approach includes:

- Posting brochures of current and future species available.
- Recommending a retailer selling "Fleming's" trees.
- Receiving orders from retail garden outlets.
- Sourcing a potential new retail outlet customer if the reader has supplied details of his preferred garden outlet.
- Retaining the end-consumers' names on a database list for future mail-outs of leaflets introducing new products.
- Creating a demand for the product.

## CONCLUSION

Australia has often been called "the lucky country" and this applies especially to horticulture. Despite its harsh environment, introduced woody species generally adapt themselves very well.

Australia is indeed lucky in that it is a relatively young country, the population is increasing, and there is an abundance of room in which to spread and of course plant trees of significance. And, with the introduction of exotic species to our temperate regions, the Australian landscape is now being complemented by vibrant autumn coloring.

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## "The World of Propagation" Question-Answer Period

**Bruce Briggs:** We see and hear the recommendation to plant "natives". What are "natives"?

**Bruce Macdonald:** Perhaps we do go overboard sometimes when determining what is a native. Some plants we consider as natives are, in fact, exotics that have been grown for some time and gone wild.

**Bruce Briggs:** How do we change this concept so the whole public understands what is a good, healthy plant, and what should we plant?

**Bruce Macdonald:** Obviously, it's an education process which all of us (university, nursery, extension service) have to work on. When you have a movement for growing native plants, only natives are considered worth planting. Our experience with our native west coast plants is that few of them have been promoted, such as the *Penstemon* 'Purple Haze'. We introduced *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* 'Vancouver Jade' which is a native but as soon as you put that in a climate with high summer temperatures the plant doesn't do well. A plant that is native to a particular area won't necessarily do well across North America. I think the gardening writers and mail order companies must realize that as well.

**Dick Bir:** I have a book on native plants on the market and I have been involved with programs that have existed in the east to draw attention to our native plants. What we need to do as horticulturists is get to the conferences and have the J.C. Raulston's, Mike Dirr's, and others speak to these conferences and let them know that criteria exist for quality plants in landscapes and understand between re-establishing a marsh and having a home landscape.

**Denise Laycock:** Can you propagate plants while they are in quarantine?