

Outdoor Cut Foliage Production



Introduction

Cut foliage is vegetation used in large quantities as a source of decoration on its own or in association with flowers in bouquets. Evergreen plants with green, silver or variegated leaves are usually used and species with berries are now also becoming popular. A recent statistic from Holland indicated that 25-30% of bouquets now consist of foliage compared to 5%, 15 years ago. This trend is set to increase further because of the green, healthy image presented by such products and because of the predicted increase in consumption of floral products.

The South of Ireland has long been recognised as an ideal location for the production of foliage because of its mild moist climate. By selecting sheltered sites and suitable soils, the relative freedom from severe frosts and cold winds means growth starts earlier and continues late into the year giving rapid growth rates and high yields of healthy quality foliage.

In the relatively short time since foliage production commenced in 1992, the industry has expanded to be worth €3 million to the South West where several million stems of both cultivated and wild foliage are exported annually. There is now over 150 hectares of cultivated foliage crops in the Munster/Leinster region - the largest areas in Kerry & Wexford with smaller areas in Cork & Waterford. The main cultivated species grown is *Eucalyptus* with *Pittosporum*, *Ozothamnus* & *Viburnum* also widely grown. Important forest and woodland species include Rhododendron, Pine, Noble fir and Birch.

The Markets

Traditional users of foliage – florists continue to use large quantities but the most significant change in the market for foliage in recent years has been the rapid increase in supermarket sales. Important requirements in accessing this market are:

- i Regular supply of a fixed volume.
- ii Good consistent quality with fixed specification.
- iii Fixed price.

Satisfying the above criteria have been the objectives of the industry in Ireland to date and meeting the changing requirements of that market place will be the greatest challenge for the years ahead. A wide customer base has been built up over the past number of years both at home and abroad. Customers are constantly looking for something new in this industry so it is essential to have constant contact with buyers and regular market monitoring.

Researching new species is an important part of the development of the industry in Ireland and the unique Irish climate is able to offer new species of interest to customers.



Fact Sheet No. 27 May 2006

This is one of a series of fact sheets on potential income generating activities.

*All fact sheets are available in the Advisory Section of the Teagasc Website
www.teagasc.ie*

Edited by:
John Whiskey
Paul Mc Carthy
Teagasc
Mellows Development
Centre
Athenry, Co. Galway.
+353 (0) 91 845200

Teagasc Fact Sheets present a brief overview of a topic. Further detailed advice should always be sought from relevant sources.

Requirements for production

For the producer, foliage plants must be: -

- i. Capable of rapid regeneration after cutting
- ii. Have low susceptibility to pests and diseases

Given a suitable local climate for the species to be grown, the site should be readily accessible and sheltered. For the majority of subjects the land must be well drained, yet sufficiently retentive of moisture and nutrients to maintain steady growth. A Ph level around neutral or slightly acidic is preferable to extremes for most species grown for foliage.

Most plant material is raised from cuttings with planting taking place during the late summer to early autumn period. Plant density varies from 5000 to 8750 plants per hectare depending on the species.

The site should be cleared of perennial weeds prior to planting and it is essential to follow a programme for annual weed control in the first 3 years of establishment.

Annual pruning is essential for most species to help maintain health and vigour of the plantation.

Harvesting and Marketing

All harvesting is done by hand using a secateurs. Stems should be carefully selected for quality of leaf and shoot balance. Well furnished sprays from 45 to 60 cm long with stems pencil thickness are ideal. Stems are bunched in 10`s and should be stood in water overnight where possible and kept cool prior to packing and transport.

Costs and Returns

It is important to bear in mind that whilst some species reach economic cutting size after two growing seasons, most of the other subjects require four growing seasons in the field.

Levels of annual production varies according to subject, age and vigour of the plantation. Experience to date suggests that a well managed *Eucalyptus* plantation may produce 70,000 stems per hectare and continues cropping for 12-15 years.

Costings (Eucalyptus)	€/ha
Crop establishment	€5000
Annual production costs (includes harvesting)	€2800
Net margin per hectare (from year 3)	€2200

Produced by: Andy Whelton, Teagasc, Cleeney, Killarney, Co. Kerry
Email: a.whelton@kerry.teagasc.ie ☎ +353 (64) 32344