

## Introduction

A native of Australia & New Zealand, *Ozothamnus* (family Asteraceae) is an evergreen species with silver/grey needle like foliage. The silver-grey coloured bright feathery stems fill customer needs when grown for foliage. The stems are used as 'fillers' in mixed flower bouquets, supplying an increasing export market to specialist bouquet companies in the UK and Holland, who in turn supply the major supermarkets and other retail outlets.

- SITE:** Well elevated sites south-facing aspect is desirable. The south east of Ireland appears to be a very suitable production area. The site must be accessible.
- SOIL & PH:** The soil must be deep and well drained. Will grow on a wide range of pH's but aim for a pH of 5.5-6.5
- SYSTEM:** The crop can be planted in single rows on the flat.
- CULTIVARS:** One of the main species is *Ozothamnus selago* 'Sussex Silver'. *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius* 'Silver Jubilee' is also sought after but needs a relatively frost free site on an elevated location.
- NUTRITION:** A soil test is necessary to accurately determine rates of P and K. The use of nitrogen will result in good growth response. Apply up to 70 - 100 kg/ha nitrogen in the Spring.
- PLANTS** Plants are produced from cuttings taken in the Autumn. Good strong bushy 7 cm liner size plants should be planted in the late Spring.
- PLANTING** Rows 1.5 m apart with plants 1m apart in the row. This gives an overall plant density of approximately 5000 plants per ha (2000/ac) leaving a tramline every 10-12 m to facilitate management and harvesting operations.
- WEEDS:** It is critical that the site has first been cleared of perennial weeds by spraying off, using a mixture of Glyphosate (Roundup) and Carfentrozone-Ethyl (Spotlight Plus). While the use of a plastic membrane on the planted row in conjunction with a mowed grass or cultivated strip between rows can be used as a weed control measure, the most common method is the use of carefully chosen residual and selective contact herbicides. The choice of herbicides to maintain clean plantations depends on the weed spectrum, but products such as Stomp Aqua (pendimethalin), Ronstar liquid (oxadiazon), Venzar (Lenacil) and Kerb 50 W (Propyzamide) have label

recommendations for overall or directed application. Spot treatment of perennial weeds with Roundup or hormone weedkillers is sometimes necessary in foliage plantations, even when crops are well established.

- PRUNING:** Annual pruning is necessary once the plants have established from the second year onwards. Aim to prune the plants back to within 50 cm of ground level annually.
- PESTS:** Aphids can be a threat early in the season so a broad spectrum insecticide is recommended. Slugs – have been found to be problematic particularly in wet seasons. Treatment may be justified but crops should be closely monitored.
- DISEASES:** No major disease problems on this crop.
- HARVEST:** Normally harvested from October through to April. All harvesting is done using a hand held secateurs. Generally well-furnished stems at least 55 cm in length are carefully selected for quality of leaf and shoot balance. The first stems are fit to cut in the second growing season with full cropping potential being reached from the third year onwards when up to 150,000 stems per hectare can be harvested per annum. Cropping can continue for a further 5-6 years if plantations are well maintained and managed. In most cases all grading is carried out in the field. Stems are bunched in 10's and then transported to the packing shed where they are stood in water overnight and kept cool prior to packing. The processing operation consists of tying the 10 stem bunches in bigger bundles of 150 stems and placing in a bucket containing 1 inch of water. These buckets are then placed on a Danish trollies on which they are transported to market
- COSTS & RETURNS:** For a crop grown on a bare soil system, from an initial investment of €3500 per ha, a gross return of €9000 per ha is achievable from the third year onwards. Net return depends on the grower's involvement as most of the annual cost is labour (maintenance & harvest). Even when labour for harvest is included a net return of €3000 per ha is achievable.

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