



Flower farmer Craig Scott, owner of East Coast Wildflowers, and his faithful kelpie Baz. **FACING PAGE** Pretty purple mulla mulla is in demand with consumers.



*native by design*

AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS ARE FLOURISHING AT THIS FARM ON THE NSW CENTRAL COAST.

WORDS JESSICA BELLEF PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



AMONG NEW SOUTH WALES'S secateur-wielding florists and botanical installation artists, any mention of Craig Scott and East Coast Wildflowers elicits a consistent response. By all accounts, Craig is the loveliest man in flower farming, and his range of native wildflowers can't be beat.

Aside from a short stint as a motor mechanic after high school, Craig's life has been all about plants. Floriculture is in his blood. The business of flowers can be traced back through his family history, and it's pushing forward into the next generation. "I'm a fourth-generation farmer, and now one of my daughters is a florist with a store in Paddington, so she is fifth-generation," says Craig of Bess, his eldest daughter of four. Her floral emporium BESS, located on the boutique-lined William Street in inner Sydney, is known for producing daring native arrangements that unite the delicate and the bold. "I love to work with whatever Dad has in season," Bess says.

The source of Craig's incredible raw material is the flower farm that his dad, Colin Scott, established in 1968. Faced with a 20-hectare parcel nestled into Mangrove Mountain on the Central Coast, Colin grew mostly traditional flowers like dahlias, asters and zinnias – as was the trend – while dipping his toe into native varieties.

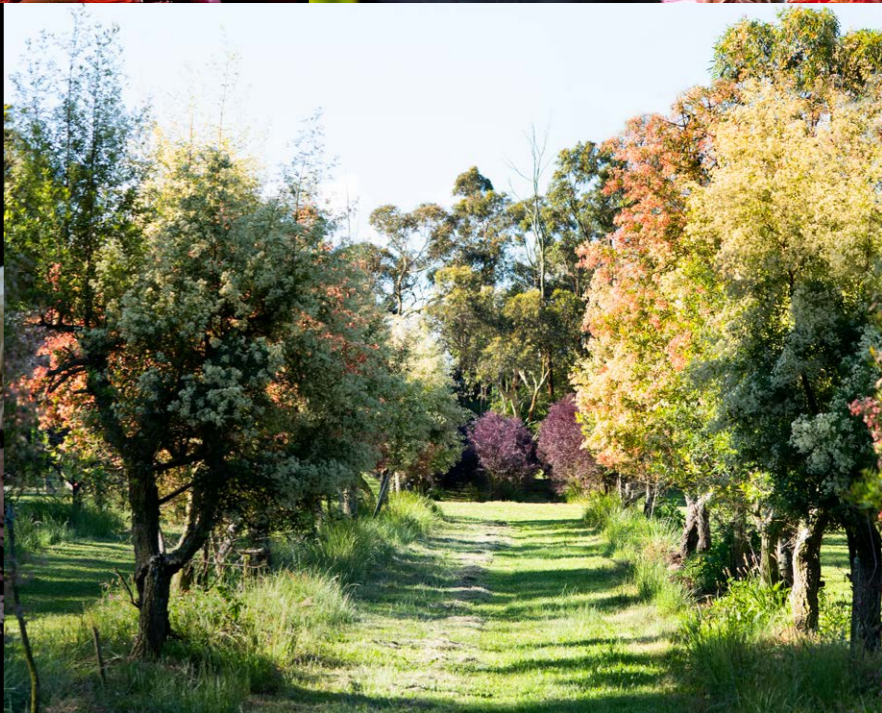
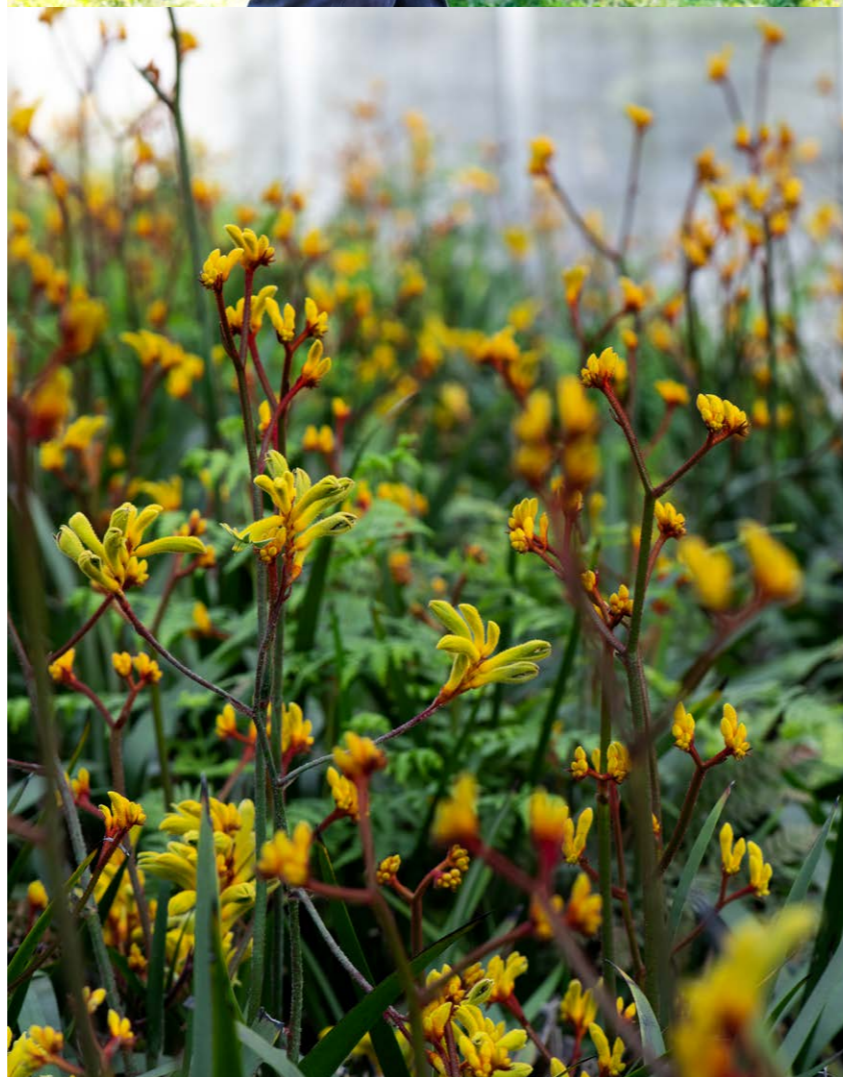
"My father introduced cut natives to the flower market in the '70s and early '80s, and it took a while for the florists to get used to them," Craig explains. When Craig and his wife, Angela, moved to the farm in 1987, they expanded the Australian offering. "I would grow things that weren't being sold at the flower markets, like the Rottneest Island daisy," says Craig. "We grew it as a row crop, and it sold well because it was something new in the market."

Thirty-five years on, Colin still works within the business, but Craig runs the day-to-day with a handful of full-time staff who propagate, nurture and harvest more than 200 varieties of plants. "And 98 per cent of the varieties are Australian natives," he adds.

The productive farm comprises 10 hectares of wild bushland and 10 hectares of open-air crop rows and polytunnels. "We also grow a lot in pots, which gives us more control over the root zone and drainage," Craig explains. "We're always looking for new varieties to grow, and there's always something worthwhile pursuing." >



**CLOCKWISE, FROM ABOVE**  
Row upon row of blooming kangaroo paw creates a spectacular wave of colour; vibrant orange flowering gum contrasts with dramatic banksia; a corridor of NSW Christmas bush; Craig collects a bouquet of dry everlasting daisies; delicate yellow kangaroo paw; Craig carries an armful of pink flowering gum.





**CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT**

Established pine trees serve as an effective windbreak for kangaroo paw varieties; radiant paper daisies bring cheer; Craig tends to hybrid kangaroo paw in the greenhouse; delightful pink and white Christmas bush; the 'Summer Red' flowering gum is intricately beautiful; an iconic Australian native flower, Sturt's desert pea thrives in the warm coastal climate; banksia robur catches the sunlight.



Not all species respond positively to the Central Coast's humidity, but Craig and his team are well-researched, methodical and determined when testing cultivars. "They might not all work, but the possibilities are out there and we just need to keep trying things," he says.

The farm is an exuberance of colour, from the deep ruby of the spectacular waratah to the soft mauve hues of mulla mulla and the paper daisy's sunshine glow. The arresting array of texture and form also inspires. "There's such a variety of natives, ranging from the bold and beautifully structural, right down to the really delicate, fine and pretty," Craig muses.

East Coast Wildflowers mostly sells at the Sydney Flower Markets in Homebush, where the working day kicks off at 11.30pm for Craig and five staff. Endless buckets of cut natives are unloaded, and wholesale orders are sorted before the market opens at 5am. The trade professionals know Craig's offering is always unique and lively.

"Native flora are very seasonal, so you get new ranges coming into the market all the time," he says. "Florists come to our stand first because they are looking for what's in season and what's new, and then once they've grabbed what they can from us, they will go and get the traditional flowers."

There's a distinct buzz around our nation's blooms – the days of uninspired bouquets of stiff banksias in cellophane are behind us. Natives are presented as wild, fresh and spectacular, and they have never been more popular. "The demand for native cut flowers is high, but there is a real shortage in the industry. We are always encouraging new growers," enthuses Craig, an unofficial spokesperson for Australian wildflowers and their exquisite, diverse beauty. "We have iconic flora in Australia."

Whether you chalk it up to nature or nurture, Craig's inherited passion has coloured his daughter's world. Bess is a champion of endemic species and their compelling displays. "My grandfather and dad are leaders in introducing Australian native wildflowers to the Sydney Flower Markets," she says. "I think my clients like that there is such a huge variety of natives to choose from and they like being surprised by things they've never seen." *CB*

Visit [eastcoastwildflowers.com](http://eastcoastwildflowers.com) and [besspaddington.com](http://besspaddington.com)

GARDEN CENTRAL COAST NSW

Eight-year-old kelpie Baz always follows the action. He's ready to go in the ute alongside freshly cut NSW Christmas bush, flowering gum and decorative foliage. **FACING PAGE** Craig is passionate about native Australian wildflowers.

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