



THE SAN DIEGO FLORAL ASSOCIATION

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A Floral Extravagance

- Proteas Take Root in San Diego
- A Garden Center in Balboa Park
- Red Ants on the Rise Part 2

Plus: Independent Nursery: Gardens by the Sea . Keys Creek Lavender Farm

"We delight in
growing spectacular
flowers for
customers who
demand unique
and creative
floral options."





Mel Resendiz: A Protea Evangelist

By Francine Phillips

The Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers supply the fresh protea blossoms sold at the “Festival of Trees” at the San Diego Floral Association’s December Nights celebration, in Room 101 of the Casa del Prado.

Ismael “Mel” Resendiz began his career in agriculture as a young man picking cotton and harvesting sugar cane in the hot, hard dirt of Sinaloa, Mexico. He and his brothers, Porfirio, Raul, and Ramon farmed in various regions of Mexico until Mel stumbled upon an opportunity to work temporarily at the Zorro Protea Farm in Vista in March 1978. The farm was growing protea from seed on 40 acres in the hills east of Rancho Santa Fe.

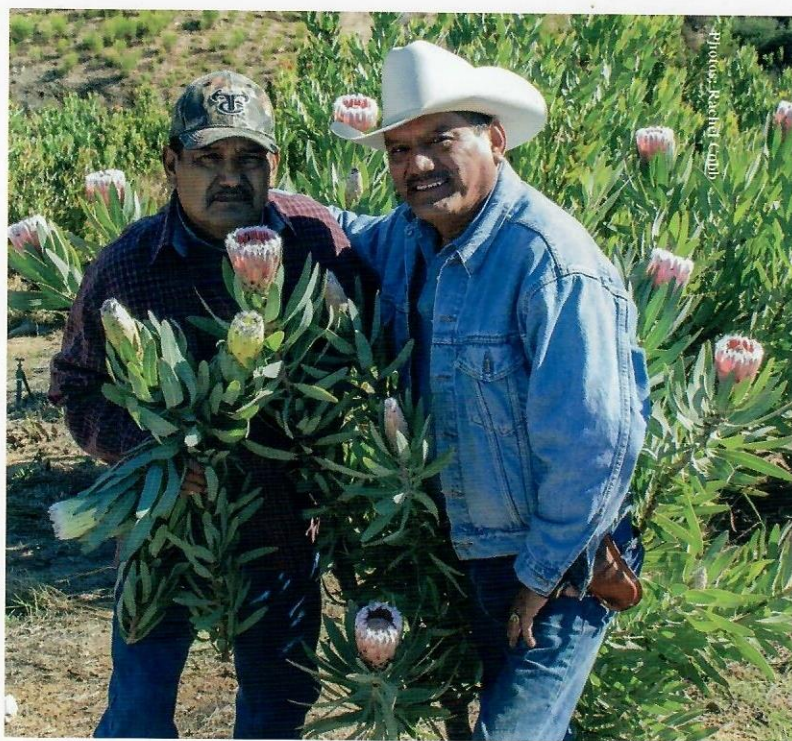
“I worked eight hours a day for \$20 a day,” remembered Mel. “Finally I saved enough money for a small trailer and I asked my brother if he wanted to live with me on the farm property.” They tended about 1,000 plants a day. “We stayed for six months, then for a year, and then three years,” said Mel. “I went back to visit my family in Mexico for the first time and when I returned, some more of my brothers came with me. I was given a raise and a rifle,” he said.

Mel’s passion for protea and other South African and Australian flowers and plants grew in those years under the guidance of the farm’s owners, Howard Asper, Sr. and Dr. Peter Sacks. Mel helped them experiment with improved soil, irrigation, and grafting and propagation techniques. “By 1987, I became foreman and managed about 60 workers,” said Mel. “By then we were growing more than 10,000 plants as I improved the land and learned more about protea and other foliage—Pincushions, Banksia, Kangaroo Paws, and Leucadendron. I had a green card, bought a house, and my passion for the plants continued to grow.”

When Dr. Sacks came to Mel in 1995 with a proposal to partner in 10 acres in Rainbow Crest, an area within the city of Fallbrook, Mel jumped on board. The deal they negotiated gave Mel a 49 percent share and Dr. Sacks a 51 percent share. “After that,” said Mel, “I learned.”

Mel kept learning. In 1999, the brothers established sBrothers Protea Growers, LLC. By this time they had cleared another 20 acres on the parcel of land and then purchased 20 more acres. Today the brothers have 300 acres under production and continue to improve farming techniques that can be unusual. For instance, Banksia requires fire to propagate. “The Banksia is burned completely and regrows from seeds released after burning,” explained Mel. “The seeds have a coating that is eaten by ants, which then enables the seeds to germinate. All it takes is a little water and a little fire.”

Diana Roy joined the enterprise as Sales Manager. She has traveled the world opening markets, and the Resendiz Brothers’



Brothers Porfirio and Mel pose in the growing fields.

Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers, LLC also grow persimmons and pomegranates.





reach has become widespread. "One of the more interesting markets we have is the annual Rose Parade in Pasadena," said Mel. "Of course, all of the parts of a float must include foliage, so any of the reflective surfaces—windows, ponds, and chandeliers—are made from the silver leaves of protea. We get orders for thousands of plants and can partner with other farmers to provide them."

In addition to being president of the California Protea Association, Mel is also a board member of the International Protea Association (IPA). He represents California growers on the IPA Council where he sits among representatives from Australia, the Azores, the Canary Islands, Chile, Israel, Hawaii, New Zealand, South Africa, Portugal and Zimbabwe.

"We have created an international community of growers and support each other," said Mel. "We share and learn and are working on grafting plants onto stronger root stock and producing more blooms."

Top: All of the dirt roads that cut across the hills through the growing areas, Mel made himself with a bulldozer. Below: A newly planted area shows how the irrigation is run. The plants just planted will start to produce flowers in 3 years.

Mel Resendiz's Protea Soil Recipe

Plants require draining soil, sometimes planted on a slope or in a raised crown.

Planting Medium:

1/3 of each

river sand

decomposed granite

fine Redwood mulch

Mix with Perlite #3

Keep moist for three days a week if in pots. In a field, two days a week. NEVER use phosphorus. Do not use fertilizer.

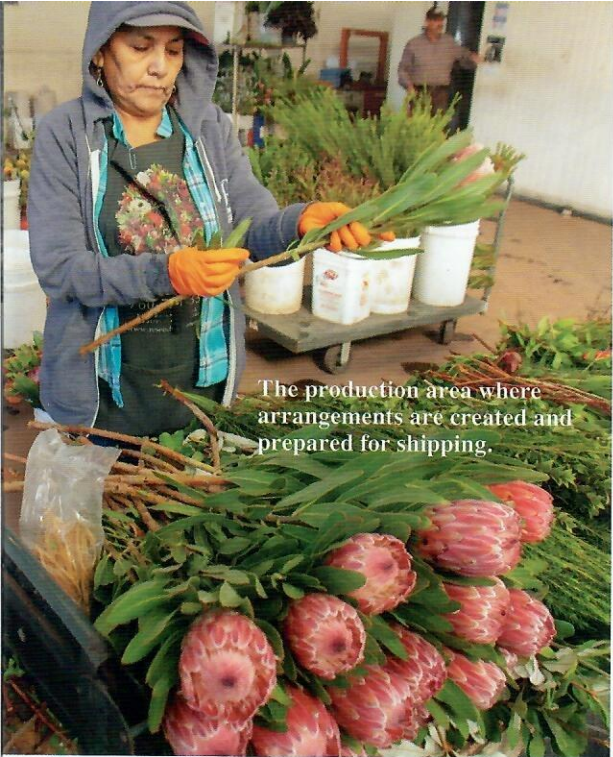
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Photos: Rachel Cobb



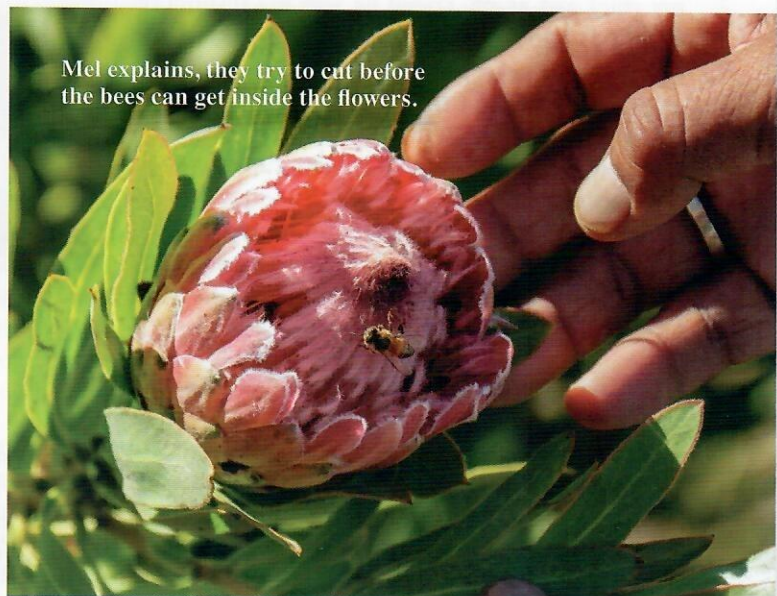
The production area where arrangements are created and prepared for shipping.



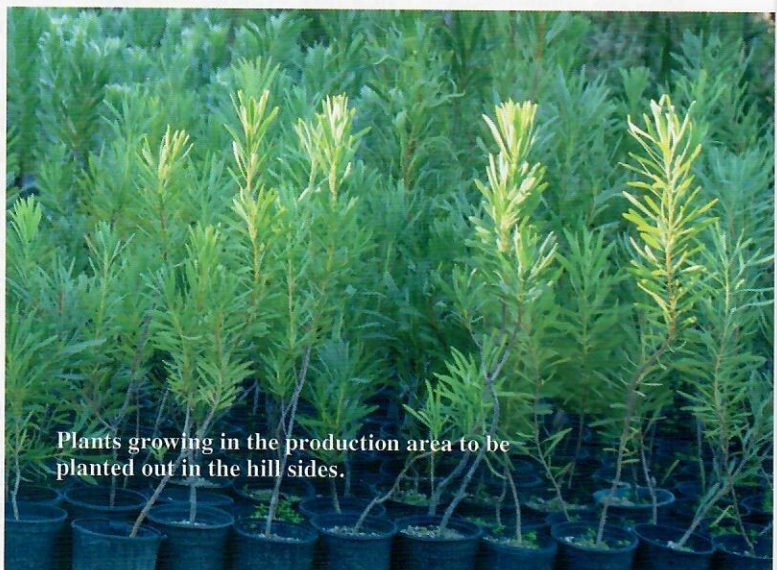
Photos: Rachel Cobb



Silver Leaf Tree from the protea family, *Leucadendron argenteum* growing, used in the Rose Parade in Pasadena.



Mel explains, they try to cut before the bees can get inside the flowers.



Plants growing in the production area to be planted out in the hill sides.