

Pick of
Hawke's Bay
2019



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Hawke's Bay
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Absolutely perfect for Hawke's Bay

By Chrys Ayley

A chance meeting between a software developer and a chemist, both contracted to work at a local woolscourers in 2014, culminated in Greg Duncan and Dr Nick Wall joining forces to investigate the feasibility of extracting pyrethrin from a white daisy known as Pyrethrum. The extracts are used in insect control products.



Greg Duncan seen here on his lifestyle block with a crop of pyrethrum.

Five years on and PyrethrumNZ is a rapidly growing business looking to build a new factory locally to cope with increasing worldwide demand for their oil and their insecticide PYNZ28. They are also seeking farmers interested in contract growing pyrethrum to help them keep up with demand.

In this era of increasing environmental consciousness the pair has hit on an innovative solution to the damage that systemic insecticides wreak on the environment. "It is time for a change. We must learn to work with nature, not against her," Greg says.

Greg lives on a 2.25 ha (5 acres) lifestyle block not far from Havelock North. They started with 1,000 plants established on Greg's land in March 2015 and waited to see if they would grow, what the irrigation requirements were and to discover the optimal growing requirements. It was quite a wait as the crop takes 18 months to mature.

They knew that pyrethrum grew well at altitude in Africa but that's because the plants need a period of cold weather. About 70 % of the world's production originates in Australia, mainly in Tasmania with more being cultivated as it's becoming increasingly popular.

As it transpires pyrethrum is very suitable for the Hawke's Bay climate as they love the heat, the dry and the cold winters. "As far as irrigation is concerned it's very tolerant to not having

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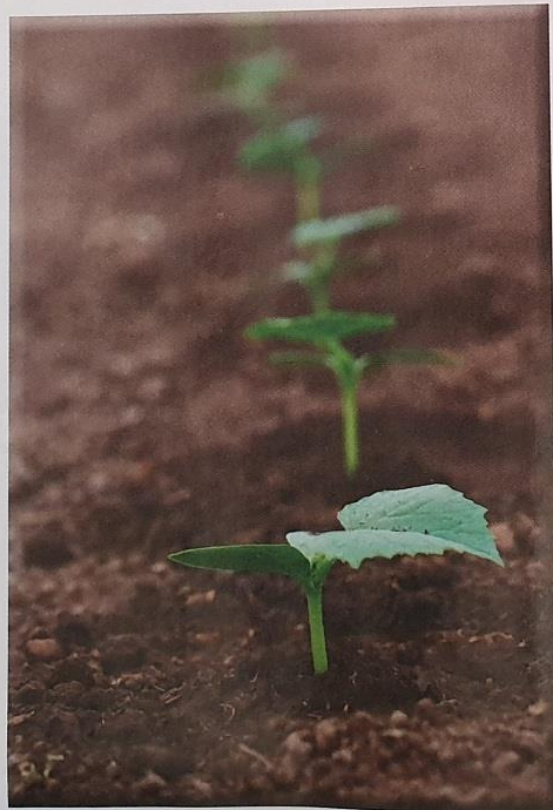
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water. There are a few weaknesses: they don't like too much water or humidity as it encourages crown rot," Greg says.

Initially they hand-picked the daisies then progressed to using hedge trimmers and now they use a harvest machine designed by Feilding based Harvester Concepts.

"Pyrethrum is a contact insecticide. It breaks down really rapidly and is suitable for places where really low toxicity is necessary. There's only a one day withholding period which makes it ideal for shipping containers. It is also used on kiwifruit, avocados and as a wash for fruit in packhouses."

"Pyrethrum is the insecticide that doesn't persist in the soil or on the products on which it is sprayed. It rapidly breaks down to become inert in the environment. It does the job and then it's gone. It is what an insecticide should be."

Clients are based in Russia, Israel and Australia and there has been great interest from Korea as regulations regarding crop residues are getting tighter. That's one of the reasons the pressure is on to build the new factory.

New Zealand is viewed by Asians as being clean and green. This is a clean green product so its market value is increased because it is perceived to be better because it is from New Zealand.

"We sell our own brand of insecticide for home and industrial use and this has been very successful for us. But our main focus is supplying industrial consumers with wholesale oil for use in

their own manufacturing. We also specialize in supplying one off formulations," Greg says.

It's not all been plain sailing, far from it as it's an expensive, not to say time consuming, business to meet regulations. They have just received Assure Quality approval.

Pyrethrum is a good crop for farmers to grow as the flowers are harvested in December and then sheep can graze on the left overs (much like a lawn mower) and receive the benefits of anthelmintic action of the pyrethrum. Greg and Nick will need a greater supply in the not too distant future.

www.pyrethrum.nz

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