



## Daily Mercury (Mackay)

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# Steel grass sets New York bouquets alight

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NEW YORK flower bouquets are about the last thing you'd guess Angela and Ross Bailey's mountainside expeditions to result in.

But thousands of their Xanthorrhoea (commonly known as grass tree) stems are harvested and sent to floral industries around the world every year.

Mrs Bailey said harvesting the stems had occurred in the region for years and she sets out two of three times a week to collect armfuls from her Sarina property for export.

"Grass trees grow in the rockiest, steepest, hardest places to get," Mrs Bailey said.

"It's a good workout, collecting them all.

"I cut each one with a

sickle and put it on the ground in the direction I'm headed, so I don't get lost. It's like leaving a trail of breadcrumb crumbs."

In order to get perfect stalks, the couple set fire to

their trees each year.

"Fire makes them thrive," Mrs Bailey said.

"They want the stalks perfect and fire gets rid of all the fungus, and gets them greener and fresher."

The stems are then trucked to Cedar Hills Flowers and Foilage, which has exported products from Australia to the global floral industry for more than 20 years.

Sarina stems go mostly to Europe and North America where they are marketed as 'steel grass' for the stems' hardiness and texture.

While grass trees take decades to grow, Mrs Bailey

said the stems grew quickly and with almost no labour input, making them one of the most sustainable crops.

"They like the stems to be about a metre, which takes between three and six months to grow to after being harvested," she said.

"They don't need to be fertilized, you don't need to work the soil or anything. They just grow faster when it rains."



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**FLORAL HARVEST:** Ross and Angela Bailey harvest grass tree stems, which are exported for use in floral arrangements in New York and Paris.

PHOTO: REEF CATCHMENTS.