

Certificate of quality helps local producers

by WENDY WOODS

THE Mathews family have worked for more than 20 years to establish the protea as a new crop and popular garden plant in Australia through its Monbulk company Proteaflora.

The presentation of a quality certificate this week acknowledges the company's success and achievement of international quality standards.

The ISO 9002 certificate is awarded by Australian Auditing and Certification Services and acknowledged internationally.

Director David Mathews said that Proteaflora was one of the first Victorian nurseries to gain the quality certification and also one of the first to gain accreditation under the Nursery Industry Association of Victoria's scheme.

"There is a very rigorous process to gain the

quality certification and it is the culmination of two years' work for us," he said.

"It doesn't stop with the award as we will be checked every six months to ensure we keep updating."

The company was started by Peter Mathews 23 years ago and is now run by his two sons, David and Andrew, their wives and a staff of 18.

Hardy

Peter Mathews worked as an accountant, minister of religion and social facilitator.

He decided to grow proteas for something to do in retirement. Virtually none was being grown in the Dandenongs at that time.

"Dad knew nothing about growing protea except it was a very hardy South African plant," son David Mathews said.

"We imported seeds, modified and learnt as we

21-5-97 Free Press



Floral tribute: David Mathews celebrates the Monbulk farm's quality achievement. Picture: JANE OLLERENSHAW.

7/1/054

The company also exports with Japan as the biggest market.

"Our export business was one of the reasons it was important for us to gain the quality certification, as it acknowledges

"It is very colorful and another advantage is that it flowers during the winter months."

Retail garden centres buying potted plants are the company's biggest customers.

more than 1000 available.

Mr Mathews said the protea was a hardy plant that needed little attention. "You just put it in, then do nothing and it survives," he said.

went and started a program to introduce proteas to home gardeners."

The company grows about 60 different varieties of protea on its 12ha property.

However, there are

we have international standards," Mr Mathews said.

The certificate will be presented to Proteaflora today (Wednesday) by Senator David Brownhill.