

Will Some Plants Get “Green Cards”?[©]

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INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of invasive landscape plants emerged publically only in the mid-1990s, it has quickly become one of the foremost challenges for the nursery industry. Initially started as a concern that non-native plants were overrunning natural areas, it has evolved into a complex and challenging puzzle for all of us who produce, maintain, and market landscape plants. Depending upon which perspective we choose to take, the challenge presented by invasive plants can be a threat to our well being or an opportunity to improve our industry. In any case, this issue will not go away anytime soon, and it holds potential to become a fundamental base for building the future of our industry.

This session is intended to offer an overview of the invasive plant issue and provide specific examples and resources for additional information. The expectation is that all members of I.P.P.S., and soon the entire nursery industry, will more fully understand and appreciate the importance and complexity of the issue. From the global industry perspective, we need to come together as an industry to present a unified approach to resolving invasive plant challenges.

THE CHALLENGE

The fundamental basis of the nursery industry is horticulture — our “currency” is the wide array of plants we utilize to accomplish the results our customers want. Restrictions imposed upon what plants we use or how we use them have potential to impact us negatively, particularly if we lack control over the results. Our member businesses cannot always agree on what courses of action to take, nor can they provide the resources needed to fund extensive invasive plant research or fuel public relations initiatives. But because we tend to be personally involved in our businesses, we ally closely with our customers and can appreciate their wishes and influence their choices. Our real power to influence outcomes rests with the willingness of our people to individually advocate for sustainable consequences.

Many groups outside the nursery and landscaping industry have proposed simplistic solutions to the invasive plant problem. But history has taught us that, for the nursery industry, simple “one-size-fits-all” answers rarely produce the necessary results. We are the people who deal daily with many of the plants under scrutiny, and we depend upon a wide range of plant availability for our livelihood. Should we allow others to determine how to manage these issues; we relinquish control of the outcomes. If we can hope to be successful in our efforts, we must join together as an industry to fully understand the issues, agree upon our courses of action, and individually commit to participate in the processes to develop the solutions that will best serve us going forward.

LOOKING FORWARD

The public generally recognizes the nursery industry as the primary source of landscape plants. We are widely perceived as the most reliable source of information about plants and how to use them in landscapes. Our nursery industry leaders understand that we cannot be perceived as opposed to self-regulation for our selfish benefit. A number of major nursery players have chosen to take strong ownership of the invasive plant issue and view this as a prime opportunity to improve the industry.

To optimize our efforts in the eyes of the public, we need to agree upon our position, define it in a manner understood by all, and set policy to help coordinate our actions. Having a strong national base upon which to build will help guide our actions at local levels and help develop the most effective results. Combining a local perspective with a consistent industry framework is essential — invasiveness, even among the same plants, will vary depending upon soils, climate, environmental influences, and many other factors.

NURSERY INDUSTRY INITIATIVES

A number of industry initiatives are currently under way, nationally, regionally, and locally. Nursery representatives were influential participants in 2001 at the Missouri Botanic Garden where the Voluntary Codes of Conduct were developed. Many groups are now adopting these. In September 2006 a meeting to develop national guidelines for cultivars of invasive species took place in St. Louis with strong nursery industry participation. Some states have adopted legislation and regulation for invasive plants. Often as these were developed, nursery members have recognized the importance of playing key roles by insisting upon scientific bases for decisions and list development. But there is wide variation in the extent industry members participate from state to state.

The American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA) is recognized as the foremost national voice of the nursery industry. The ANLA Invasive Plant Task Force has committed to analyze the issues related to invasive plants and formulate recommendations for the industry. The Task Force will be concerned with plants that are already in commerce, as well as those plants not yet available on the market. As a start, Task Force members expect to formulate a national policy statement that can be used by the industry. This will help position us as the “good guys” in these efforts, preserving and protecting our industry image as a responsible steward of the environment. Education, communication, scientific analyses, and research are all critical components of this process. Members of the nursery industry are the ones best qualified to accomplish these results, and we have willing partners in many arenas ready to provide assistance.

In order for this to be effective, everyone in the nursery industry must become familiar with the issues, recognize the opportunities, and reach consensus on how to proceed. Once we understand the value of leveraging our expertise for the betterment of the industry, the outcomes will be improvements for everyone. Let's use this session as a starting point to ensure total industry involvement in this essential endeavor.