Invasive Ornamental Plant Education and Outreach for Green Industry

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Why do we care about ornamentals?

![Pie chart showing usage breakdown for the sixty-six plants on the IPAW working list of Wisconsin invasives (2003).](image)

(Panke 2012)
How does an ornamental “escape”?

- Seeds carried by animals, wind, and water
- Plant parts transported
- Stolons and rhizomes make their way to adjacent areas
What drives choices for gardens?

- Beauty
- Novelty
- Keeping up with the Joneses

Leads to –
Importation of exotic plants from around the world
How do we change this?

Education and outreach to

- Green Industry
- And its consumers
Collaboration

- Midwest Invasive Plant Network
- The Nature Conservancy
- Chicago Botanic Garden
- Lake County Forest Preserve District
- Northeast Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership
- Funding: Gaylord & Dorothy Donnelley Foundation
Initial Steps

- Start the conversation with green industry
- Provide visual evidence of problem at trade shows
- Develop tools for green consumers
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Documentary about Invasive Ornamental Plants

Visual evidence of impact on natural areas

- Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)
- Burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*)
- Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*)
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Tools for Green Customers: Smart phone application

- Free for consumers to download
- Handy portable resource for visits to garden centers and nurseries
- Can access information via scientific or common name
- Provides list of native alternative species

The app is currently available for free download to iPhones and iPads from the Apple Store.
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Green Industry Survey

- Letter of introduction + MIPN Landscape Alternatives brochure sent to 41 green industry suppliers

- Email and follow-up phone calls

- Surveyed 22 green industry suppliers: 7 questions
Question 1

Do you think invasive ornamental plants are a problem? Is this an issue you are concerned about?

• 14 answered yes
• And other responses…
Some Answers

• In your area it is a problem.
• Define ‘invasive.’ Facts aren’t complete. Any plant that produces seed can spread and become invasive.
• Depends on the plant you’re talking about.
Question 2

How do you think the issue of invasive ornamental plants should be approached by people working in conservation and members of the general public?
Some Answers

• Responsibility lies with the professionals
• People will respond to credible information when they receive it.
• Educate the end user.
• Through enacted law and education
• Ecology and conservation professionals need to be engaged with green industry-each side knows little of the other’s field
• Identify what is truly invasive; grower has different opinion
• We’re ignoring bigger problems like field thistle, amaranths…in natural areas or on land that is neglected. Most important is poison ivy and teasel.
Question 3

Does your company currently sell species that you believe are invasive in natural areas? If so, would you consider phasing them out? If not, why not?
Some Answers

- If all suppliers take appropriate action then it would be fair.
- Sells plants still in demand- burning bush spp. and honeysuckle.
- Not convinced honeysuckle and burning bush are invasive.
- Try not to. Follow laws and regulations from state.
- If there is a market for the plant they will sell it.
Question 4

The phasing out of which species would you consider most problematic for green industry? And why?
Some Answers

• I am not aware of any.
• No opinion.
• Hasn't seen problems with burning bush. Doesn't think proposed alternatives are appropriate due to differences in color, growth, texture or habit.
• Japanese barberry, burning bush, and Callery pear are not invasive to the point where they need to be addressed.
• Laws would make a big difference here.
Proposed Problematic Species

- burning bush species
- Callery/Bradford pear
- Japanese barberry
- bush honeysuckles
- multiflora rose
- buckthorn (bootleg market)
- purple loosestrife
- Amur maple
- Norway maple
- mulberries
- Russian and autumn olive
- Miscanthus spp.
- Vinca minor
Question 5

Do you think a short documentary about impacts of certain ornamentals would be an effective tool for green industry outreach?

• 11 answered yes
• 1 answered no
• and . . .
Some Answers

- Has to be tackled from grass roots level and from consumer end
- Yes, there is a definite void that such a documentary could fill.
- Yes. To truly see the impact would be good.
- Yes, but need a celebrity endorsement-Martha Stewart or P. Allen Smith.
- Five years ago, yes. Now trade show attendance is so reduced that the effectiveness would be diminished due to lack of attendance. Youtube or state association websites would be a better outlet for the documentary.
Question 6

Do you think customers (and green industry) would make frequent use of a phone app about invasive ornamentals and safe alternatives?

• 11 answered yes
• 4 answered no
• And ...
Some Answers

• Cost efficient
• Yes! Garden centers need to be in on this at the front end.
• Likes it for the younger generation.
• Sees generation gap in who it will reach.
• Resources already available. Would be redundant. Uses USDA plants database.
• Native alternatives are invasive, too (milkweed, grasses, and asters for example).
Question 7

Would you consider working with us to transition to the sale of non-invasive plants?

• 8 answered yes
• And ....
Some Answers

• We would be supportive of your efforts
• No. We are a broker ... The ornamental invasive issue needs to be addressed by the landscape and nursery industry first.
• Would certainly. Every year goes over master list and drops items. Would possibly take native alternatives into consideration at that time.
• Yes, if there's a market for it.
• At this point in time depends on extent of list of plants. Barberry and burning bush he would probably not stop selling, but purple loosestrife is extremely invasive. Decisions would be based on state regulations.
• Yes. Would like to learn a lot more. Currently sell a lot of Cleveland select pear.
Recommendations

• We need to talk with (and listen to) green industry on a regular basis.
• We need to be very well prepared (visual and research data) when presenting our case for certain plants.
• Laws and regulations will be effective, but we also need to work with green industry to find feasible time ranges for phasing plants out.
• We need to engage green industry consumers on a large scale and link their purchases to tax expenditures on invasive ornamental control in addition to ecological impacts.