

# The St. Louis Declaration on Invasive Plants, Codes of Conduct, and What They Mean to Propagators®

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## INTRODUCTION

Increased awareness of the environment and the natural areas around us has had a tremendous positive impact on the nursery industry. Sales have soared. We truly have ridden the crest of the public's desire to be out of doors, enjoy the ecological and sensory benefits of landscaped surroundings, and the business community's desire, often, to outdo each other in elegance of facilities. With these positive benefits the industry has enjoyed, there also follows a responsibility. It is imperative we be viewed as a stakeholder in the environment and as a responsible citizen of our community — no matter which community that might be.

One of the areas where the nursery industry has come under close scrutiny is its relationship with some of the plant species we promote and produce and their importance to the natural areas, which surround us. Not all of that scrutiny has been positive.

## INVASIVE SPECIES, ENVIRONMENTS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Some of the more strident environmentalists have accused the nursery industry of being the main gateway to plant invasion by undesirable or damaging plant species. Much of this criticism is a cover for other issues. Some, however, is not. Without question we have contributed to destruction of wild areas, albeit inadvertently most of the time. Those incidences are the focus of the invasive plant movement.

To show you the ardor with which groups look at this issue, I cite the following: "Invasive species are like a buzz-saw cutting through some of America's most valuable bird and wildlife habitat," said Bob Perciasepe, Audubon's Senior Vice President for Public Policy. There are many more examples and much more radical perceptions out there.

Equally important, many in the nursery community have ignored their part in this arena. Purple loosestrife, mimosa, honeysuckle, golden bamboo, and Japanese barberry are just a few of the plants once common in production which are widely recognized as causing ecological harm.

## PROBLEMS WITH ORDINANCES AND REGULATIONS

The pressure has been great in many areas. In Florida, for example, several counties have tried to implement ordinances, which will address the issues. They, however, in their zeal, have failed to understand the full impact of what they were proposing and how that would affect the gardening public and our industry, which supports it.

Palm Beach County proposed an ordinance, which would have made it illegal to propagate, grow, sell, distribute or transport through their county up to 120 plants they deemed invasive without regard to science. Stiff penalties were suggested. That becomes dastardlier when the list they proposed is imposed on the ordinance. For example, *Schefflera* was on that list. *Schefflera* is a major foliage plant produced

in Florida for consumption all over the U.S.A. Most of that consumption is for interior use. Can you imagine all of those plants being prohibited from being trucked up Interstate 95 to northern markets?

### **RESPONSE OF THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TO INVASIVE PLANT ISSUES**

In an effort to address this issue responsibility, several nursery associations have become very aggressive in working with the invasive plant interests to seek solutions to the problem with which we can live. The Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association (FNGA) has been one of the nation's leaders, as has the American Nursery and Landscape Association. Others associations have followed. Our goal has been to address the issue with the seriousness it deserves and develop a strategy, which has minimal regulatory impact on the industry.

FNGA has asked its members to voluntarily stop growing 43 plants, which are widely considered to be invasive. Massachusetts has worked to develop a set of criteria to assess if plants are invasive and a strategy to manage those, which are. There, hopefully, are many such examples of industry working with environmental groups.

### **ST. LOUIS INVASIVE PLANT CONFERENCE**

In 2001, a group of invasive plant stakeholders had an informal meeting at the Missouri Botanical Gardens to discuss a national strategy to address the issues surrounding invasive plants. Representatives from the nursery industry, botanical gardens, the Nature Conservancy, and other environmental groups, garden clubs, universities, government agencies, and landscape architects participated in the three-day conference. The conference was sponsored by the Missouri Botanical Gardens and Kew Gardens (England).

From that conference, a list of overarching principles was developed. These guidelines are a strategy for all the groups to address the invasive plant issue. The principles are:

- 1) Plant introduction should be pursued in a manner that both acknowledges and minimizes unintended harm.
- 2) Efforts to address invasive plant species prevention and management should be implemented consistent with national goals or standards, while considering regional differences to the fullest extent possible.
- 3) Prevention and early detection are the most cost effective techniques that can be used against invasive plants.
- 4) Research, public education, and professional training are essential to more fully understanding the invasive plant issue and positively affecting consumer demand, proper plant use, development of non-invasive alternatives, and other solutions.
- 5) Individuals from many fields must come together to undertake a broad-based and collaborative effort to address the challenge, including leaders in horticulture, retail and wholesale nurseries, weed science, ecology, conservation groups, botanical gardens, garden clubs, garden writers, educational institutions, landscape architects, foundations, and government.

- 6) A successful invasive plant species strategy will make use of all available tools including voluntary codes of conduct, best management practices, and appropriate regulation. Codes of conduct for specific communities of interest are an essential first step in that they encourage voluntary initiative, foster information exchange, and minimize the expense of regulation.

This set of guidelines has been uncontroversial — without exception. Once these are accepted, the next step is to seek recognition of voluntary codes of conduct. The keyword here is “voluntary.” Each of the participating groups at the conference developed a set of voluntary rules with input from the other stakeholder groups — something each group could accept. These codes are now being considered throughout the United States as a meaningful way to responsibly address the invasive plant issue. The Codes of Conduct are applicable to the specific groups.

The Southern Region of North America is the first group of the International Plant Propagators’ Society that has been asked to consider endorsing these voluntary codes of conduct. I have asked your Board of Directors to consider having the membership address these codes during the business meeting. The six principles of the voluntary codes of conduct for nursery professionals are:

- 1) Ensure that invasive potential is assessed prior to introducing and marketing plant species new to North America. Invasive potential should be assessed by the introducer or qualified experts using emerging risk assessment methods that consider plant characteristics and prior observations or experience with the plant species elsewhere in the world. Additional insights may be gained through extensive monitoring on the nursery site prior to further distribution.
- 2) Work with regional experts and stakeholders to determine which species in your region are either currently invasive or will become invasive. Identify plants that could be suitable alternatives in your region.
- 3) Develop and promote alternative plant material through plant selection and breeding.
- 4) Where agreement has been reached among nursery associations, government, academia, and ecology and conservation organizations, phase-out existing stocks of those specific invasive species in regions where they are considered to be a threat.
- 5) Follow all laws on importation and quarantine of plant materials across political boundaries.
- 6) Encourage customers to use, and garden writers to promote non-invasive plants.

Other groups which have adopted the voluntary codes of conduct are:

- American Nursery and Landscape Association
- American Society of Landscape Architects
- American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta
- The Garden Club of America
- The Federated Garden Clubs of Missouri
- The National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils
- Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council

- Chicago Botanic Garden (also implementing the Codes)
- Missouri Botanical Garden (also implementing the Codes)
- North Carolina Botanical Garden (also implementing the Codes)
- University of Washington (also implementing the Codes)
- Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association
- Tampa Bay Wholesale Growers Association
- Perennial Plant Association
- Texas Nursery and Landscape Association
- Michigan Invasive Plant Council
- Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council

Voluntary is the key. Voluntary participation prevents untenable regulations, promotes good citizenship, enables all groups to share equally in the problem — and long-term is the most effective control of invasive pest plants.

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## Propagation Problems and Solutions for Texas

### SuperStar® Plants®

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#### INTRODUCTION

Texas SuperStar® is a Texas A&M University System trademarked nomenclature and label which is bestowed on specially selected plants which have attributes that make them Texas' tough and consumer friendly. Skeptics often wonder how certain plants can be chosen as better than others. While it is true some people have never met a plant they didn't like, plants, which attain SuperStar® status must be attractive and useful to the masses rather than to a special few hobbyists and collectors. Every effort is made to ensure that SuperStar® plants will consistently perform well for Texas consumers regardless of their plant growing expertise. There is no perfect plant, so limitations of highlighted plants are explained to avoid discontent by those who overlook the obvious when growing plants. Realizing that some folks "can mess up a ball-bearing" and no plant is "bullet-proof", everyone is not successful with SuperStar® plants. However, the vast majority of successful gardeners are making Texas SuperStar® plants a permanent part of their landscapes. This explains why the majority of Texas SuperStar® plants have generated millions of dollars in revenue for wholesale growers. The characteristics that make a plant a winner are outlined at <[http://www.plantanswers.com/superstar\\_selection.htm](http://www.plantanswers.com/superstar_selection.htm)> and images of all selections can be seen at <[www.SuperStar.com](http://www.SuperStar.com)> and <[http://www.ktc.net/plantanswers/superstar\\_gallery.htm](http://www.ktc.net/plantanswers/superstar_gallery.htm)>.

The majority of plant selections, which have attained the Texas SuperStar® status as listed at <[http://www.plantanswers.com/superstar\\_listing.htm](http://www.plantanswers.com/superstar_listing.htm)>, have originated in San Antonio under the tutelage of horticulture interests in this area. A very important factor, which must be considered when selecting plants for SuperStar® educational and marketing campaigns is whether sufficient numbers of plants can be produced to meet the increased consumer demand to be generated. Nothing angers a consumer or nursery producer more than having insufficient numbers of pro-