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A Local Native Nursery Perspective on Propagation: One Way

Rick Webb

Louisiana Growers, 63279 Lowery Road, Amite, Louisiana 70422, USA

rick@lanativeplants.com; www.lanativeplants.com

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Summary

There are opportunities for the green industry to produce native plants that perform functional ecological services. Native plant species can be produced for building constructed wetlands for stormwater management, loosely termed "Green Infrastructure". Millennials are looking for functional, sustainably produced landscape plants – not just traditional, containerized shrubs and trees that look "polished" in the landscape. We include a list of suggested plant for green infrastructure management in Louisiana and environs.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will attempt to address how a small wholesale nursery in the U.S. Central Gulf South utilizes the owners' interest and education in the propagation and production of native plants. Louisiana Growers is a wholesale nursery farm specializing in plants native to the inland U.S. Gulf South, from grasses and wildflowers to canopy shade trees. Our products are utilized in enhancing constructed environments. Our customers are now demanding nursery products and services that perform functional ecological services, for example, the supporting of pollinators and birds, the restoration of disturbed lands, the reducing of garden maintenance and the production of edibles.

One involvement in ecological functional service is in the current movement to use nursery crops in the building of constructed wetlands for stormwater management loosely termed "Green Infrastructure".

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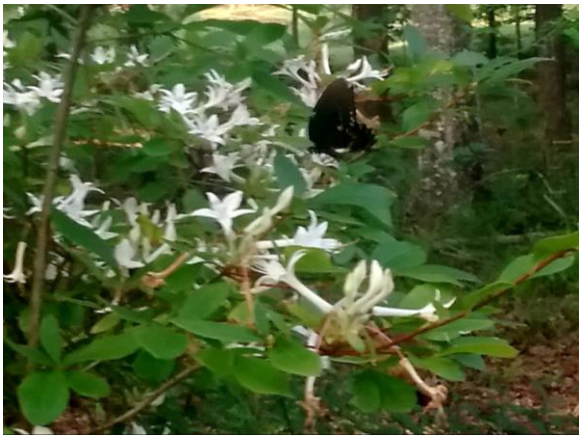
New? I know it is not. Green Infrastructure has been around since "Adam and Eve". It has existed from gardening for food, to the shading and decorating of our homes - and even to managing storm water. Propagating, growing and functional use of plants is embedded in our civilization. The green industry has traditionally focused on the latest trends - from the latest variegated plant variety to the most floriferous forms as ornamental landscape plants to satisfy consumer demand. Yet we all know our green products and services are much more important than that.

The Green Infrastructure emphasis provides an avenue for our industry to enhance and broaden our status as the Green Industry. Please do not avoid the environmental opportunities of our future. Green is who we are. Green is what we do. And Green is how we should do it.

Stormwater management entails managing surface water runoff, mainly from rainfall or snowmelt. It embodies techniques, structures and land features used to slow, capture, reduce pollution, and to reuse or to timely release runoff water. This is most important in developed areas where impervious surfaces (roads, pavement, buildings, roofs, housing, industrial sites) limit direct absorption of water into the land.

We now think differently from previous designs of channeling and rapid disposal of water and run-off. We need to refocus water capture systems to manage rainfall: slow it, hold it, let it be absorbed or used. The instruments of our Green Industry trade in design, material supply, installation and maintenance are the perfect land shaping tools for addressing Green Infrastructure opportunities.

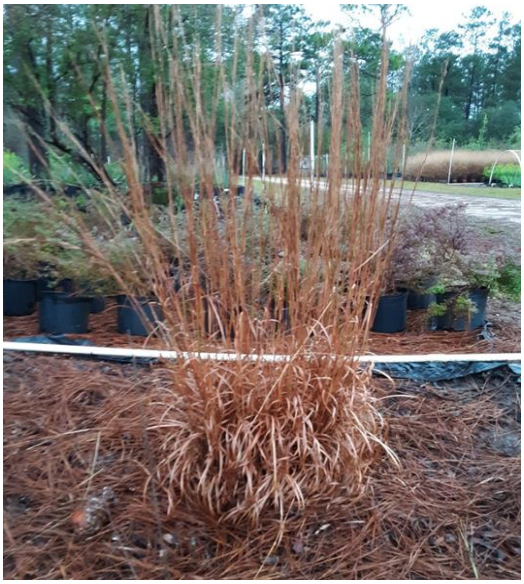
The following examples are some of the "G.I. Jane's and Joe's" species we produce for wetland construction.



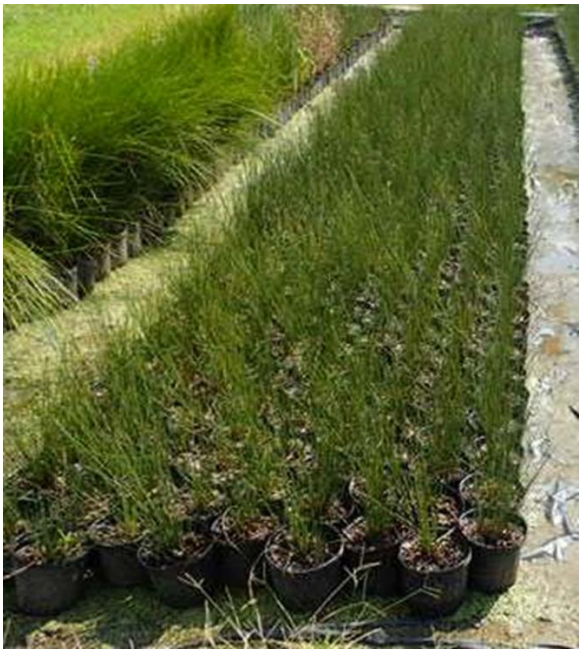
Rhododendron viscosum. Swamp azalea is a deciduous native azalea that has white flowers and reaches a height of 1.5 m (5 ft). Found near, but not in, swamps. It is fragrant and grows well in some shade. Easy to grow, this native azalea blooms in late spring or early summer when the pollinator populations are high and active. It is a butterfly magnet.

Cyrilla racemiflora. Swamp Titi is a small, native semi-evergreen shrub that reaches 3-4.6 m (10-15 ft). It features summer flowers that are fragrant, creamy-white racemes that are 8-15 cm (3-6 in.) long and give the appearance of downward pointed fingers. Summer fruits are yellow-brown. It is suited best in full sun or partial shade and is perfect for naturalized plantings. In cold winters, interior leaves turn yellow and red before falling. Grows naturally on acidic, wetland soils, but can tolerate dry soils once it has become well established. It is highly attractive to bees and birds.

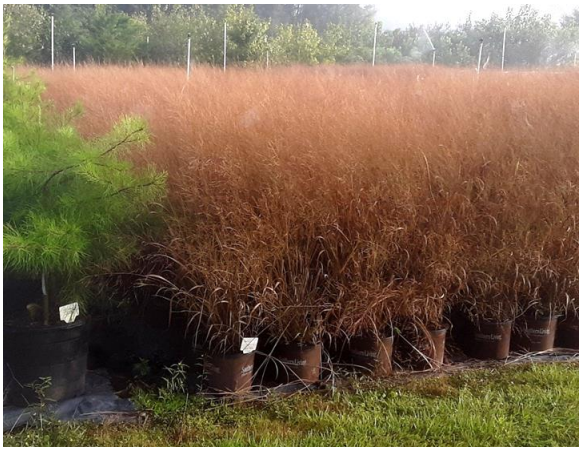
Hymenocallis sp. Spider Lily is a perennial that grows 0.3 – 0.6 m (1-2 ft) tall. Grows in high, sun or part-sun, with showy, white, fragrant flowers in spring and early summer. It grows in poorly drained sites such as ditches, marshes, and bottomlands. It is useful in bog gardens and along the side of ponds and lakes in the landscape.



***Schizachyrium scoparium*.** Little Bluestem is a native ornamental grass with fine-textured foliage that forms dense mounds 46-61 cm (18-24 in.) tall. This grass produces slender, blue-green stems in August and reaches 0.9 m (3-ft) by September. It becomes mottled with mahogany-red with white, shining seed tufts in the fall. Grow well in full sun, also likes sun, part-shade in well-drained soil.

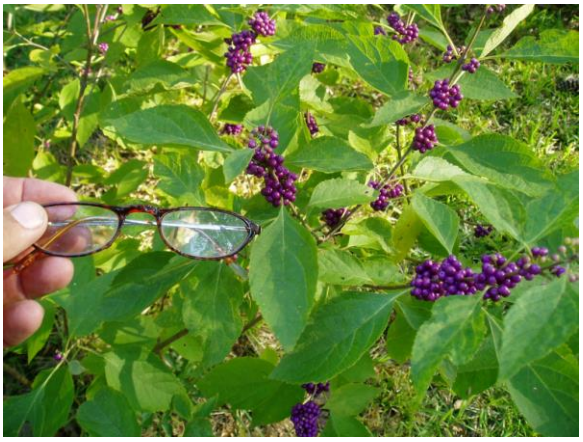


***Juncus effusus* 'Elfin Green'.** Soft Rush is a smaller growing selection of *Juncus* that grows in moist/wet soils, tolerating standing water to 10 cm (4-in.) depth. Adapted to full sun, but tolerates light shade. This plant will perform well in average garden soils as long as it receives consistent irrigation. It may be grown at the edge of a pond or water garden, in boggy areas, among wet gravel, rocks or in several inches of standing water. It delivers an evergreen component to a rain garden.



***Panicum virgatum* 'Short Sassy'.** Switchgrass is a more compact habit and fuller growing variety of the species. It reaches 0.9-

1.5 m (3-5 ft), has fall-flowering spikes with soft golden seed heads, which remain attractive into winter. It tolerates poor soil, from dry conditions to frequently inundated wetlands and full sun for strong growth. You should simply cut it back in early spring.



Callicarpa americana **'Bonner Creek'.** American Beautyberry is a more compact selection of the large loose deciduous shrub to 1.8 m (6-ft). It has medium foliage and small pinkish flowers lead to the eye-catching clusters of bright purple fruits that circle the stems. It has light green foliage that turns yellow in fall. It does well in full sun or under a pine canopy. Very tolerant of dry conditions and the fruit serve as a wildlife moisture source during drought. As with many fire-resistant (pyrogenic) shrubs, it should be severely cut-back every few years.

SOME ADVICE

Based on our experience, we suggest to others interested in Green Infrastructure is to take time to get out in the natural areas of your regional zones. Take note of the plants in their native spaces. Observe the hydrology, geology, light and ecology. Learn from these cues how select species might work in your production system and in your client's projects. These observational spaces start from roadsides to U.S. National Forests. So, get the right pair of water-proof boots - and Get out there!

Addendum

Selected text from the Fall 2019 newsletter of the Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association reprinted with the author's permission: For those businesses already established in the horticulture industry, millennials have a different consumer mentality. As we progress and gain more purchasing power, we are doing our research and looking for responsible businesses that provide plants that do more than look 'polished' in a landscape. We want plants that have function. We're truly searching for ways we can improve our environment with each purchase. For growers and retailers, that means incorporating more native plants and sustainably grown merchandise into your business model. Native plants are in high demand due to this new generation and the growing force of green infrastructure. The horticulture industry should take note!

By Felice Lavergne. An urban planner specializing in stormwater management, a Master Naturalist, Native Plant Initiative member, and a Millennial!