

AQUATIC HORTICULTURE WORKSHOP

November 7, 2005

U.C. BERKELEY BOTANICAL GARDEN

Workshop Minutes

Tom Courtright, American Nursery and Landscape Association, feels there should be a national committee on invasive plants;

Terri Kempton at California Partnership for the Prevention of Invasive Plant Introductions through Horticulture suggested Sunset Magazine to write articles on invasive species. Work with Master Gardener to get the word out.

Non-invasive alternatives need to be recommended
Focus on consumer behavior rather than shifting sales away from invasive species.

What are the difficulties and benefits in making transition to non-invasive species?

How much time would you need for transition from selling invasive species to non-invasive species?

Jeff Hart, Hartland Nursery, and Marketing: Customers are already committed to cause; they are looking for a “total experience”.

Eco-tourism – native plant nursery, farm-stay.

Heritage of California, working landscape, focus on these themes.

Grand Island, Steamboat Slough, 10 acres = Jeff’s business location

Neil Bobo, Berkeley Horticultural Nursery, It is very difficult to find submerged species that are native. Wholesalers don’t sell submerged plants because people want showy and colorful plants. Raccoons spread plants from pond to pond. Would like to get a list of natives and they could focus on selling those. How close is customer to natural water body? Need to ask this. Teach kids: Mount Diablo High School pond-they will be collaborating with them. Diversity of a state creates problems with native-where is native? Santa Cruz vs. Sonoma County-native in one county but not the other. Genetic stock not same even within areas-isn’t appropriate. Conversely, regionally native soils are different as well. Use “native” too liberally. Waste water treatment for water hyacinth “good use of plant. “– working with Pond kit marketing groups to educate consumers about what to plant and proper disposal methods would be a great relationship to build. We need to change what the idea of a water garden looks like for the public. Change the concept of what a water garden is. They haven’t sold water hyacinth for 2 years. And they sell aquatic plants well: \$26,000.00 in sales last year.

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Karen Norman-Boudreau: We don't have the capacity to market submerged plants like *Ceratophyllum* or the capacity to keep them healthy (need circulating water)

Jeanne Nader: "Point of Sale" most important place to be educating consumer.

Private Industry – cannot use this approach. Give "Stamp of Approval" for industry doing the right and sustainable thing. Buy friendly certified landscapers – advertise these.

What is origin of a water garden concept?

If you want to change idea of what a water garden is, you need to work with publications like Home and Garden, Sunset, HGTV, etc, Water Garden News, Water Garden Magazine; lots of natives (wetland) bloom in late summer/fall. This could be a new growth area for industry. How common are "kits"? Karen thinks 3 of 4 water gardens are "kits" at first. Then consumer upgrades.

Beckett-kits manufacturer

Impulse buys and smaller kits more popular because larger ponds are bigger investments. Pond costs start at \$1,000.00 and go up to \$70,000.00+ for pond kits.

What's driving water garden industry? Middle class worker want to be on vacation when they come home from work and go into back yard and escape. Average of \$15,000.00 cost of pond. Most people leave plants in pots and buy new ones after they've outgrown pot. Raccoons are a big problem in Bay Area because they raid ponds. Partner with CNPS and others to focus on California Heritage.

Botanical Gardens – educational role needs to increase. Plants need to be available to nursery trade. Suppliers are constrained by what's available but it's expensive to get certain plants.

There is consumer confusion and frustration – will buy whatever is available. Not many new cultivars coming in. Need displays of California natives to allure customers to buy. Industry perspective – term "native" plants is big red flag – should be using "invasive" instead. There are some native that can be invasive too, like cattails and Elodea. "non-invasive" California friendly is term Jeff uses lots of ways to present the combinations of plants – redwood boxes next to benches where people sit. Weed ID handbook by Berkeley Press lists many natives considered to be weeds – water plantain (*Alisma*).

Customer trust is important – need loyalty. People from big box stores come back – unhappy with what they get. Want more sophistication. Nursery staff –

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no idea how to display or get info out about invasive. Customers are starting to make more informed choices.

One unhappy customer tells 1,000 people.

One happy customer only tells 1 or more people.

Karen Norman-Boudreau: has a tag in plant pots saying that a particular plant can be invasive. Customers don't want to wade through written material. Nursery staff has to verbally educate customers. Go over each and every plant and give information. How can communication improve at big box stores? Quality of service is important but won't have highly trained people in big box stores usually. Big Box stores worry about public relations – not about the finer points of educating their customers correctly. There should be a certification process for people who work in retail. Study and take on-line tests.

Become a member of the California Certified Nursery Professionals. Need to take continuing education units. At least it creates awareness. However, these courses don't get to level of really knowing the plants. Per Bob Falconer of California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers, CANGC, the courses don't get into very detailed plant information.

Big Box: this could be where Habitatitude comes in to help them. Small retailers are more likely to be innovative and idealistic. Making money is bottom line – that is reality. Carrot is always preferred over the stick. Disposal can be a problem – putting in a “green” bin isn't good enough – some plants can survive. Need a special bin for people to dispose of pond waste where they can't escape.

Obstacles:

Time – there is never enough

Ponds aren't big enough part of business yet.

If nurseries sense their business is in jeopardy they'll come to meetings. (ie – will policy offset any bottom line?)

California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers – CANGC:

Nurseries already have lots of problems – sudden oak death, glassy-winged sharp shooter. Need to put on “white hat” first – need to get industry leaders aware and voluntarily leading way.

Big box will be on board first – Monrovia, etc. Hines now wants to be involved in issue. Need to attend meetings to put in your 2 cents.

New niche should be looked upon as a good opportunity.