

Invasives: The Challenge in Plant Introduction®

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INTRODUCTION

New plant introductions have fueled the commercial nursery industry since its conception. A constant search for new and improved selections has captivated many enthusiasts and sent them to the far corners of the world in search of the next spectacular find, or to be in awe of the glory of a floral display in a plant's native land. This passion will continue to send many of us abroad in the years to come and, as we do, we need to keep a primary objective in mind. How can we responsibly search for new plants in other countries, and more importantly, bring them back to the United States of America with confidence that our efforts to share a piece of beauty is not transformed into the next invasive plant.

HAVE A PLAN

Although it would be impossible for anyone to predict every plant's invasive tendencies due to the number of factors that can be involved, having a plan before you start is important to reduce the chances of this event happening. Our best approach to stopping any potential invasive is to leave them where you found them. With this objective in mind, here are a few key points that you may consider in your plan as you bring new plants into the U.S.A. from other countries.

- Have clear objectives before you bring new plants into the country and stick to your plan.
- Refer to the list of weedy plants or potential weedy plants compiled by the U.S.D.A. or your state and use them. If a plant is on the list, do not import it.
- If you are involved in overseas travel, have a list of key plants of interest before you leave and make sure they are not on weedy plant list while you have the time to check.
- Adopt and use one of several weedy plant assessment tools that have been created to determine a plant's potential for invasive tendencies.
- Ask questions or observe a plant in the country of origin. If it has aggressive tendencies in its natural local, it will likely exhibit the same characteristics somewhere in the U.S.A.
- Stick to proper importation procedures to include permitting and phytosanitary requirements.
- No soil should be present on the roots of the imported plants. Many pathogens and insect pests are found in native soils which are a vector for transfer into the United States.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Once a plant is successfully imported, there are key steps that should be taken upon receipt and before release. Often "hitchhikers" are the biggest threat from plant introductions, and not the actual plant. Many of the current insects and pathogens

threatening flora of the U.S.A. are exotic in nature. Their introduction could have been prevented if improved importation practices were followed.

- Have an established receiving process in place for all plant material brought onto your nursery. This is especially true of plant material brought in from overseas.
- Immediately inspect material upon receipt for any known pest.
- Have a check-off system that ensures each step has been completed and also provides history of any pest(s) that was found and treatments that were made. If you have any doubts as to the severity of a pest, destroy the plant material.
- Keep records of where and from whom the plant originated. Also include the import permits and phytosanitary paperwork in your records as well as shipping history.
- Keep plant material isolated from normal production plants until they can be placed in your observation area.
- Have an established observation area separate from normal production areas that will allow post-entry quarantine requirements to be met. In some cases this is up to 2 years or growing seasons, so be equipped to handle this.
- Observe plant material being held in the observation area. At any indication of potential invasiveness, these plants should be destroyed.
- Once your primary evaluation period is over, it would be good to have key cooperators that you can share plant material with. By doing this you can create a network of evaluators in different regions of the United State to evaluate the plants aggressive tendencies in their own areas.
- Be on the look-out for new or unusual weedy plants that you may find in your evaluation area. Eliminate them as soon as you find them, and do not allow them, if at all possible.