

Horticulture Working Group Notes

Notes by Terri Kempton

Facilitator: Mark Newhouser

Meeting objectives:

- discuss strategies to prevent the introduction of horticultural invasives
- share experiences working with nurseries
- create a list of best practices in working with nurseries on the issue of invasive species

Terri Kempton gave an update on the California Horticultural Invasives Prevention (Cal-HIP) partnership.

- Cal-HIP has 20 steering committee members that represent the horticultural industry, environmental groups, academics, arboreta, and government agencies. The group adopted objective, scientific criteria for assessing the invasiveness of horticultural plants in wildlands that were developed by the California Invasive Plant Council. The steering committee reviewed these independent scientific assessments and vetted their findings with the Cal-HIP stakeholder communities.
- Because California is such an ecologically diverse state, Cal-HIP decided to address horticultural invasive plants on a regional basis. The group wanted to avoid creating a state-wide list of invasives that wouldn't apply to all areas and could be easily disregarded. After careful consideration of the major ecosystem types in the state, and the need to clearly communicate the message about invasive plants, the group settled on a five-region system for California, based on the Sunset Garden Climate Zones: North and Central Coast, South Coast, Central Valley, Sierra Nevada, and Desert.
- Some invasive species have outstanding questions, and Cal-HIP is guiding research to fully investigate their biology, dispersal mechanisms, and ecological impact. A complete list of the invasive plants (to be regionally listed) and the plants under investigation, see Appendix A.
- The Cal-HIP Steering Committee, working with professional marketing consultants, is developing a unified outreach campaign called "Plant Right" to educate the industry and the public about how they can prevent invasive plant introductions through horticulture.
- First, Cal-HIP will focus on outreach, education, and support of the California horticultural industry to provide information and assistance to growers, nurseries, and landscapers as they phase out invasive plants and promote non-invasive alternatives. To ensure that consumer demand reflects these changes in the industry, Cal-HIP will then lead a campaign to educate and motivate the gardening public to purchase and plant non-invasive species. Materials may include a dynamic website and informational brochures, posters, FAQ sheets, and wallet cards. "Plant Right" information can be included in curricula, landscape certification programs, and trainings for nursery professionals and home gardeners.
- By the next Cal-IPC Symposium, Cal-HIP should have "Plant Right" materials to share with attendees and could run a workshop to train interested members to work with nurseries to eliminate horticulture as a vector for invasive plant introductions.

The group identified two tactics to approaching nurseries and affecting their decisions regarding invasive species: top-down (like Cal-HIP) and bottom-up (grassroots efforts). The latter was the focus of this working group.

Betty Young has been working with Kate Symonds on an action plan devised by the Marin/Sonoma Weed Management Area (WMA). Since demand drives retail choices, this group worked with the local RCD, landscapers, the Sonoma Ecology Center, and CNPS to develop materials in hard-copy and CD-ROM to educate the public about horticultural invasives. They web researched and used suggestions of non-invasive alternative plants from Cal-HIP and adapted them to the Marin/Sonoma area. The materials they created explain the importance of horticultural invasives, giving the general public good reasons to change their behavior.

One of the materials is a questionnaire that serves as a guide to non-confrontational conversation with nurseries about invasives. Members of the WMA divided all of the nurseries in their area between them for direct contact. While passive observing of nursery stock is an easy task, recruiting volunteers for this type of conversation has proven difficult.

The working group discussed grassroots efforts to affect nursery decisions about invasive plants. Participants agreed that repetition of the message will be critical, and that the more sources saying the same thing about horticultural invasives, the more effective that message will be. The group identified the following list of best practices and further needs:

- Staff members to conduct outreach
- Backup of consistent Ag. Commissioner response to specific invasive plants
- Master Gardeners to conduct outreach and education
- Potential program to be developed: “Adopt a Nursery” to pair volunteers with nurseries
- Speakers at CANGC meetings and other trade events
- Correcting recommended plant lists that currently include invasives
- Supporting research to isolate weedy cultivars

The group then set goals for where they would like to see things by next year:

- More volunteers talking with nurseries
- Distributing more regional materials to nurseries and the public
- More participation in horticulture sessions in the 2008 Cal-IPC Symposium
- A workshop to train Cal-IPC community on working with nurseries, presented by Cal-HIP and the PlantRight program
- Participants in this working group returning to their communities, reviewing the Marin/Sonoma WMA materials, and generating their own goals for outreach in the coming year