



STATE ISSUE: INVASIVE PLANTS

POSITION: FNGLA supports science-based risk assessment criteria to evaluate plants for potential invasiveness; research and identification of alternative cultivars and plants; and, adherence to voluntary codes of conduct for industry professionals.

BACKGROUND: It is undeniable: invasive plants threaten natural areas. Yet, there is great scientific and industry debate over not only which plants are truly invasive, but which research-based criteria should be used to assess the potential for invasiveness. FNGLA has worked with the University of Florida to develop, test and implement a science-based risk assessment protocol to evaluate plants for invasive characteristics. Horticultural science's principle of "putting the right plant in the right place" is a guiding force in determining which plants -- and under which site-specific conditions -- may exhibit invasive potential.

Nursery and landscape industry professionals have a strong vested interest in environmental stewardship. Since 1997, FNGLA has participated in on-going discussions with the environmental community. As a direct result, FNGLA was one of the nation's first industry associations to urge its members to cease production, installation and sale of 43 plants widely believed to have invasive potential in the landscape.

Many imported plants are prohibited or restricted due to the risk of introducing new invasive pests or diseases. Many plants are subject to inspection at ports of entry and the federal government maintains a list of prohibited noxious weeds. FNGLA fully supports the maintenance of a single noxious weed or invasive plant list for Florida under the jurisdiction of the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services. FNGLA believes this list must distinguish among Florida's geographic or climatic regions. The list must also recognize a plant's different uses, such as whether it is intended to be used indoors or outside in the landscape.

The consumer's desire for new plants exhibiting color, hardiness, and ease of maintenance is driving new plant introductions in the market. FNGLA strongly supports the industry's shifting focus to the research and breeding of new plant selections or cultivars lacking invasive characteristics. At an international meeting on invasive plants held in St. Louis in 2001, a Voluntary Code of Conduct for nursery professionals was developed and subsequently endorsed by FNGLA. In part, its principles are intended to ensure that invasive potential is assessed prior to introducing and marketing plants new to North America.