

CHICAGOLAND GROWS - A PROGRAM OF PLANT INTRODUCTION

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Plant introduction is one of the principal goals of botanical gardens and arboreta. The success of such programs has often been fraught with considerable difficulty and frustration, with limited success for the number of attempted new plant introductions.

Analysis of the issues relating to a public plant introduction program have been conducted. Of critical concern to the success of an introduction program is effective communication among the research and development program, the producer and the end user. Marketing forms an important component that is commonly overlooked in introduction programs.

The Chicagoland Grows program was initiated in 1988 by the Chicago Botanic Garden to achieve a new and viable plant introduction program. The organization of the program takes account of the three principal elements of an introduction program; namely, research and development, evaluation and production, and marketing and sales. To achieve an effective working program, a separate incorporated program was established by the Chicago Horticultural Society. This new entity consists of a tripartite

governance, the Chicago Botanic Garden, the Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois. The Chicago Botanic Garden serves as the coordinator of the program.

The inclusion of a nursery industry component is critical to the success of the program for two principle reasons: (1) the industry is involved with the decision making regarding the selection and evaluation of the taxa to be introduced; and, (2) the industry is responsible for the production and distribution of the taxa introduced. Previous introduction programs managed and operated by not -for -profit institutions have often floundered because there was not contractual arrangements with industry and the nursery trades was not involved in the decision making process for the selection and evaluation of the taxa to be introduced.

The corporate structure allows support from both industry as well as not -for -profit institutions and provides for contractual arrangements to provide for licensed growers and the establishment and collection of royalties

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to support the program's research and development.

The responsibilities for the operation of the program are managed by a Board of Directors, consisting of representatives from the three principals; the Chicago Botanic Garden, the Morton Arboretum, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois. Committee structures provide for: research and development; and, the release and introduction of the new taxa. The Chicago Botanic Garden coordinates the program and provides for the legal aspects of trademarking and patenting and the coordination of appropriate registration and documentation of the new introductions. The Garden also oversees the regular evaluation of plants under evaluation and the development of new cultivars in production. These secretarial functions are the responsibility of a full time Coordinator, Plant Introduction Program.

The registration, trademarking and production of written promotional materials are coordinated by the Chicago Botanic Garden. Much time and effort has been devoted to the development of appropriate information and establishment of promotional events for various nursery trade events and symposia. Separate information release sheets are prepared for each of the introductions. A separate publicity brochure has been developed to provide general information to potential contributors and users of the program. An extensive list of contacts has been

established across the country to provide additional review and evaluation of plants under consideration and to provide new plant proposals for the program. At the present time, our mailing list contains some 300 contacts that are kept informed of the progress of the program.

The goals of the program are to encourage the use of existing cultivars that may be under used in the nursery industry and to introduce new plants produced through breeding and development. The long -term goal is to provide a timely and regular introduction of new plant cultivars through selection, breeding and evaluation that will have particular value to users in the Chicagoland Region and the greater region covered by USDA growing zones 3 -5.

Currently, the program has introduced two plants through the program. One, *Cotoneaster X hessei*, an older cultivar particularly useful as a ground cover that has not been generally available in our market region; and *Viburnum dentatum* 'Synnestevedt' trademarked as Chicago Lustre™ Arrowwood Viburnum, a medium sized ornamental shrub of value for many different uses in both private residential and industrial site landscape development. The latter cultivar has been grown in the industry for the last several years, but the identity of the cultivar was not properly established until the program undertook a detailed evaluation of the plant. one of the goals of the Chicagoland Grows program is to

provide proper botanical identification of the cultivars and this cultivar is a good example of the role that an introduction program can play in providing information to the end user of the validity of the taxon in question. It is incumbent upon an introduction program to ensure that releases are properly identified and classified.

Plant distribution of cooperators now totals 51 sites. Some 28 growers have been licensed to produce plants under evaluation. The list of licensed growers includes colleges and universities, research stations, botanical gardens and arboreta, golf course and public horticultural programs in park and recreational districts in towns, municipalities and counties. A total of 11 states are now involved in the program of evaluation.

In addition to the present two releases, a number of plants are in the final stages of evaluation and will be released in the near future pending the results of the information garnered from the evaluation program. Potential new introductions include cultivars of the following species and hybrids:

Acer x freemanii
Acer miyabei
Acer nigrum
Betula nigra
Betula utilis
Buxus sempervirens

Euonymus alatus
Fraxinus americana
Malus sp.
Rhus copallina var. latifolia
Syringa pekinensis
Taxus X media
Ulmus japonica X U. pumila
Ulmus japonica X U. wilsoniana
Viburnum dentatum

These plants will be assigned appropriate cultivar names and in some instances, a trademark name will be given to the released plant.

The program has some 39 taxa under consideration at the present time, ranging from trees to perennials. Particular attention is being devoted to ensure that the proper evaluation includes care in the assessment of the correct botanical and horticultural nomenclature and that trademarking or patenting is consistent with currently accepted procedures for their assignment.

The program is always interested to learn of plants that have special merit for our region and inquiries are welcome. The contact for the Chicagoland Grows, Inc. Program is Don Brennan, Coordinator, Plant Introduction Program, Chicago Botanic Garden, P.O. Box 400, Glencoe, Illinois 600224400. Mr. Brennan's telephone number is (708)835 - 8301.

