Going Native – Part 3

By Marge Hayes

We finish this series on native plants with the ideas of five more designers.

Richard Liberto of Liberto Landscape Design and Consulting in Pittsburgh specializes in naturalistic designs. His favorite native, Little Bluestem Grass, has proven popular with other designers as well. *Schizachyrium scoparium* grows to 3'+, providing an elegant, vertical element to his compositions. Its thin blades stir gracefully with the slightest hint of a breeze. “The fall color is often a burgundy red that fades to a burnt-orange providing outstanding winter effect...often times becoming illuminated by the...setting sun.” There are no drawbacks to this plant, according to Richard, as the plant seemingly thrives on neglect. It may be slow to establish but is well worth the wait. His problem plant has been *Rudbeckia triloba*, Brown-Eyed Susan. It has died out at many different sites and Richard suspects it’s been soil-related. He now takes soil samples on every job as a regular course of business.

Douglas Owens-Pike of EnergyScapes, Inc. in Richfield, MN designs sustainable landscapes using native plantings. He finds *Euonymus atropurpureus*, Eastern Wahoo, to be very useful. It’s a large shrub or small tree with attractive foliage during the growing season but its defining feature is beautiful pink to purple fruit capsules that split to reveal dark red seeds in September-October. It performs in sun or shade and tolerates dry conditions well. Douglas adds that the Native Americans ‘planted Wahoo around their camps to inspire the warrior spirit, keeping “undesirables” at bay. Other natives Douglas chooses not to use are *Eupatorium rugosum*, Snakeroot; *Sambucus sp.*, Elderberry; and *Silphium perfoliatum*, Cup Plant for their keen ability to spread throughout a landscape. Attractive, yes, but they tend to crowd out other plants, thereby undermining the diversity Douglas seeks to have in his designs.

Janice Lindegard of Urban Prairie Landscape Design, Inc. in Oak Park, IL loves to use *Sporobolus heterolepis*, Prairie Drop Seed, for many reasons so I’ll list them as she did for me:

- Great form – It’s a fountain shaped grass with a restrained growth habit that forms nicely rounded clumps, about 12” high.
- Great texture – Very fine blades.
- Great flowers – Numerous blooms in July and August, also very finely textured.
- Great fragrance – Some have described it as the smell of buttered popcorn.
- Great ability to blend with other plants – It is useful planted around spring bulbs so dying foliage can be camouflaged by the growing grass blades. It also blends well with daylilies, which Janice uses regularly.
- Easy care – As with most grasses, Prairie Drop Seed can be left alone to thrive for most of the year, only needing an annual haircut in the late winter. Its only requirement is full sun in any well drained soil – it won’t grow without it.

Lana Niva Rocha operates Expressions of Nature in Walnut Creek, CA. Her favorite, most useful natives are species in the genus *Arctostaphylos*. The variety of sizes, forms, and textures make them versatile plants in the landscape. Not only are they evergreen with beautiful flowers and fantastic bark colors, but they’re deer resistant, low maintenance, drought tolerant, and long lived. The only drawback is that they’re slow growing so may take some years to get to their desired size. Lana’s least favorite native is *Baccharis pilularis*, Dwarf Coyote Bush, due to its lack of visual appeal. It’s valued, however, as a hardy cover on dry slopes and for its fire retardant qualities.

Leslie Coulter of Outdoors By Design in Shelton, WA picks our beautiful Pacific Northwest Vine Maple, *Acer circinatum*, as her favorite native. This large shrub/small tree takes on a variety of forms and colors depending upon where it’s sited. In sun, the winged samaras are scarlet in the spring and the leaves turn fiery shades of orange, maroon, red, and purple in September. In shade, the leaves turn a soft yellow. Even out of leaf, the vine maple has attractive branching and greenish bark, providing nice form and color in the winter months.

Thanks again to all those designers who spared some time to share their ideas. Two recurring themes resonate and reflect back upon the responses I received – that of availability of native plant material and that of site analy-
Landscape Water Efficiency: A New Profit Center for Green Industry Businesses

By Tom Ash
Horticulturist, Director of Conservation Alliances HydroPoint Data Systems

Water Moves the Green Industry?

What are the market forces that will move the green industry in years to come? How will the green industry react to those forces? And what should the green industry be doing to make sure it is positioned and can take advantage of any shift in market needs?

As a Cooperative Extension horticulturist, I was placed by the University at public water agencies 15 years ago. My role was to help green industry professionals and water users, such as homeowners, homeowner associations and cities, understand what an efficient landscape was and how to achieve it. Why? Water, as it turns out, comprises about 50% of total urban water sales. Yet, it has been found that as much as 50% of the water we are applying may not be needed by the landscape. In other words, water is being wasted in urban landscapes and it is hurting the landscape industry, nation-wide.

Make Water Efficiency a Profitable Core Business

How much water are your sites using? How much water should they use? How can every landscape site be made water efficient? How can you sell water efficiency to your customers?

Water is the #1 issue facing the green industry today and out into the future. Why? Communities are paying customers to remove landscapes (Las Vegas). Public agencies are restricting water for landscape use (Colorado, Georgia, Utah, New Mexico, Texas). Some communities tell landscape water customers to expect shortages/shut-offs during peak-use summer months (San Diego County). Some communities are looking to ban new development (Lake Arrowhead, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, parts of central California). Whether it's drought, peak use beyond the ability of the water infrastructure, or population growth that outpaces the ability to deliver water to end users. Any way you slice the water supply pie, wasting water is bad for green industry business. Because, when there is not enough water to go around, the landscape irrigation will be the first use to be restricted.

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sis and subsequent choice of appropriate plants. Several designers cited availability as a key limitation in the promotion of native plant use in designed landscapes, which can result in a hard sell to clients. I'm not sure how to resolve that problem, although I think it would be beneficial to build and maintain relationships with your local nurseries, and make known your desire for certain plant material. Your persistence can influence nursery inventories. In addition to finding the plants, some natives can be particular about site so a careful analysis, including soil evaluation, is a wise course of action. The soil evaluation would include pH, texture analysis (sand, silt, clay), and N-P-K as a minimum and can extend to include information on micronutrients and populations of biological organisms. If the soil is inadequate in some respect, plants will not perform optimally and may eventually show signs of stress and decline.

I'd appreciate any questions/comments you have on any of the information covered in the three Going Native articles. You may e-mail me at MargeHayes@msn.com.

Based on the experiences in California, where the green industry came under severe economic hardship due to drought and water restrictions in the early 1990's, here is a formula for success with respect to making landscapes efficient and creating new business opportunity:

1. Measure each site (square footage) to help determine a site water budget
2. Find the local ET (from university or public agency websites)
3. Understand the water needs of the plants on your sites (crop coefficients)
4. Use the following formula to determine a site water budget: (ET) (Kc) (LA) = Site Water Budget

ET=Weather in terms of inches of water
Kc=Crop coefficient (or a plant factor)
LA=Landscape area

5. Compare the site's actual water use to the site water budget
6. Landscape irrigation system upgrades (retrofitting aging, leaking, poorly designed irrigation systems)

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