

## OUR GREEN PHILOSOPHY

We consider ourselves conservationists with this strong sentiment at heart: it is of the utmost importance that we act as stewards of the land. We have great respect for the natural world and attempt to live our lives in accordance with this deep love.

- ⌚ At Quackin' Grass Nursery we employ IPM (Integrated Pest Management) methods. Our cultural practices engender production of clean plants – balanced fertilizer, plenty of water and proper lighting help to make the difference. We also encourage beneficial insect populations. Usually we approach occasional marauding insects with light oil sprays during the growing season. We actually use chemical-based pesticides very rarely and only when absolutely necessary. We never broadcast spray, only specifically targeting an affected plant or group of plants which may have a persistent problem when benign efforts have failed. We also tend to carry plants that exhibit good disease resistance which eliminates many potential problems. And we do not mono-crop. One great incentive for us not to incorporate the use of treacherous chemicals is that we live above and drink from the aquifer that also serves the needs of the nursery!
- ⌚ We enthusiastically encourage our customers who live within driving distance of the nursery to return empty plastic pots which housed the plants that you have purchased from us. This is another instance of recycling at its best. One footnote: we do not accept annual six-packs or like containers as these items are not generated here. We do not use them as we do not as a rule sell annuals. We do not accept branded pots such as "Proven Winners" etc.
- ⌚ In the age of climate change and increasingly expensive energy we have conscientiously implemented frugal use of electricity and fossil fuels. In fact, we have always been “green”... having been born of frugal stock we learned at an early age to always turn lights off when leaving what was about to become an empty room, always turn off the tap while brushing teeth and like energy and water-saving methods. In my years here at Quackin' Grass we have never recycled paper or cardboard. Rather, it is used as weed suppression in the gardens then covered over with wood chip mulch – recycling at its most energy efficient, I think. We recommend this method to customers. Although inks have become more “green” it is perhaps not wise to line beds of herbs, medicinal plants, food plants/vegetables, indeed any plants which may be ingested or used topically with many of these materials, particularly glossy paper. We also recycle wood ash – yes, we use a wood stove in the basement to cut our dependence on fossil fuels. Wood ash is gently “sweet” and well-used on daffodils, clematis and any plants that prefer a higher or sweeter soil Ph.

- ⌚ We compost all kitchen waste as well. We “sheet compost” in an area that will become a future garden (actually an extension of an existing garden). The waste includes tea bags, coffee grounds, Kleenex and all vegetable matter. And though unconventional we do include animal fat and bones. The reason...
- ⌚ We have a vibrant small mammal population that forage these items. These animals include opossum, raccoon, and skunk. We do find birds in this area, too, some mornings when dumping yesterday’s scraps. Fox, coyotes and bobcat are not uncommon visitors to the nursery. We have a perhaps *too* vibrant population of rodents of all stripes including both red and gray squirrels. Wood chucks are seen with regularity during the warmer months. Deer can be problematic year round but especially in winter. Rabbits are often so profuse by late spring as to be a problem. We have occasionally seen shoaat (ermine) and fisher cat on the property. Many if not most bat species are in terrible straits in the northeast as many of you know; and the problem is spreading. We see fewer and fewer. Our hearts hang heavy with concern for these amazing mammals. Did you know that one healthy adult can consume hundreds of mosquitoes in a single hour in the dusky skies? And with subtropical mosquito-borne illnesses moving north as the climate warms the loss of our bats will have direct negative consequences for we, the non-flying.
- ⌚ Also, on the environmental front, we continue to plant the display gardens with thought towards attracting native bird, native bee, honey bee, butterfly populations and various other pollinators. In that we have displaced some habitat as we developed the nursery we do attempt to give back to our winged friends in plantings, food and nesting opportunities. Many of the perennials planted in the gardens are both food and nectar sources for hummingbirds, caterpillars, butterflies and moths. We also do feed the birds during the winter months, both seed and with a corn meal, flour and lard mixture pressed into the holes of one of our “woodpecker feeder logs”. It is always great joy observing who arrives at the feast. Quackin’ Grass has become a virtual bird sanctuary reflected in vibrant populations of native birds. We are proud of our efforts in this regard.

## **THE BIRDS at QUACKIN’ GRASS...**

### **The Usual Suspects – *or* common sightings and/or residents:**

Great Blue Heron  
Mallard Duck  
Turkey Vulture  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Mourning Dove  
Tree Swallow

Barn Swallow  
Downy Woodpecker  
Hairy Woodpecker  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Northern "Yellow-shafted" Flicker  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
Pine Siskin  
American Robin  
American Redstart  
Northern "Baltimore" Oriole  
Junco  
White-throated Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Chipping Sparrow  
Cedar Waxwing  
Rose-breasted Grosbeak  
Colorado House Finch  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Rusty Blackbird (usually [but not always] when migrating)  
Wood Thrush  
Veery  
Carolina Wren  
House Wren  
Northern Cardinal  
American Goldfinch  
\*Yellow Warbler  
\*Black and White Warbler  
\*Golden-winged Warbler  
Eastern Kingbird  
Common Yellowbird  
Great Crested Flycatcher  
White-eyed Vireo  
Red-eyed Vireo  
Eastern Phoebe  
Eastern Wood Pewee  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Eastern Bluebird  
Blue Jay  
Indigo Bunting  
Gray Catbird  
Tufted Titmouse  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Northern Mockingbird  
American Crow  
Wild Turkey

\*(regarding Warblers: I suspect we have many more here than we know.  
Certainly many pass through during migration.)

**Occasional Sightings:**

American Woodcock  
Sharp-shinned Hawk  
Coopers Hawk  
Pileated Woodpecker  
American Kestrel (Sparrow Hawk)  
Rufous-sided Towhee  
Vesper Sparrow  
Swamp Sparrow  
Wood Thrasher  
Purple Finch  
Brown-headed Cowbird  
Common Redpoll  
Common Yellowthroat  
Scarlet Tanager  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
Common Grackle  
Canadian Geese  
Raven  
Yellow-rumped Warbler

**Rare Sightings:**

Ring-necked Pheasant (not native but welcome!)  
Common Nighthawk  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
Northern Goshawk  
Bald Eagle  
Bobolink  
Ovenbird  
Brown Creeper  
Boat-tailed Grackle  
\*Great Gray Owl

\*Regarding owls: we expect Quackin' Grass harbors more here than we know.  
Though we seldom see them we have certainly have heard owls "hoot" after dusk well  
into November. But our knowledge of their voices, the seasons in which they vocalize to  
find mates and our ability to distinguish among these sounds is fuzzy at best!

**Unfortunate Suspects: Non-native invaders**

English House Sparrow  
European Starling

## OUR INVASIVE PHILOSOPHY

Connecticut now has an invasive law, a legal mandate on the books banning the sale of a number of species. We at Quackin' Grass Nursery have strongly felt that scientific research conjoined with education would have been the most efficacious and least expensive way to resolve any questions swirling around alleged invasives.

## EUONYMUS

Any plants not presently on the Connecticut invasive list but those that we believe are a potential problem we no longer offer; for instance, we no longer sell *Euonymus alatus* cultivars.

## NORWAY MAPLE

We also do not and never have offered any of the forms of Norway Maples. They are not yet outlawed and it is perfectly legal for nurseries to continue offering them. However, we feel Norway Maples may be a problematic species; the reasons: its fecundity, fast growth, enormous size and longevity of adult trees make it possibly a true threat to wooded areas. This coupled with the potential ability to adapt and possibly bridge succession forest communities are the reasons we will not offer them. Furthermore, large-growing native maples with even greater ornamental character in more seasons than the Norway Maples are abundantly available and make splendid alternatives.

## BARBERRY

At this time it is also known that the genetic make-up of wild Barberry populations in Connecticut is largely composed of *Berberis thunbergii* (Japanese Barberry) with occasional stray *B. vulgaris* (Common Barberry). There have been natural hybrids between the two species as well known as *B. x ottawensis*. In light of this we have voluntarily stopped offering certain Japanese Barberry selections – those deemed to form profuse seed annually.

We had continued to carry gold selections. Why, you ask? Because the golden selections it seemed set many fewer seeds. 'Golden Devine' in a three year period at the planting fields of UConn produced no seed at all. And gold-leafed seedlings that actually do sprout from the cultivars, fewer than the more robust green and purple-leaved selections, have proven time and again to be weaklings; they do not harbor the strength to settle into surrounding woodlands and recently disturbed ground. These golden *Berberis*

*thunbergii* selections are probably not the purported “invasive threat” that some would have you believe.

Though it took a much longer period of time 'Golden Devine' did eventually begin to produce seed at the UCONN Agronomy Station. As to the viability and strength of those which may have sprouted it is doubtful that they will have been genetically strong.

The issue of wild, escaped barberry in Connecticut woodlands is large and great. Unless a biological control can be found and directed it is at the time of this writing, frankly, too late. But as Quackin' Grass Nursery continues to step deeper into the realm of rare and unusual plants we move farther away from the mainstream plants that one might find at local garden centers. Except for rare and unusual cultivars we have opted to discontinue offering *Berberis thunbergii* cultivars. Remember: it is still legal to sell *B. thunbergii* cultivars in Connecticut. And for many of the regions to which we ship Japanese Barberry is in no way a threat – perceived or otherwise. We will not deny those gardeners and landscapers who desire Japanese Barberry in places where it is not an issue.

## **BEACH ROSE - ROSA RUGOSA**

We also continue to offer a small list of *Rosa rugosa*. Not outlawed in Connecticut we believe reason thus far has intervened. Beach rose has only self-sown along the ribbon of land at shore's edge; never have I seen a seedling arise inland. *Rosa rugosa* tenaciously holds dunes together; its thorny branches keep people at bay barring anyone from trampling and degrading fragile dune ecosystems.

Its flowers provide nectar to native bees, honey bees, butterflies and other beneficial insects. Late season rose hips provide forage in fall and winter to browsing mammals and birds. Ornamental attributes are remarkable: large, exceptionally fragrant flowers, bright butter yellow autumn foliage often manifests acting as a foil for the weighty orange to red-orange rose hips which can be used for jelly or tea. Beach rose has been used extensively as a breeding parent for numerous cultivars of ornamental roses.

Thus far not a single study has been funded and conducted which may or may not prove that wild beach rose is an allelopathic threat to dune grasses or, indeed, this extraordinary ecosystem. The benefits of wild *Rosa rugosa* if and when actually studied may actually outweigh any presumed threat to native dune grasses. Just because it has settled into the dune community doesn't automatically make it a menace. Indeed, the possibility exists that wild beach rose actually enhances this habitat - perhaps a controversial stance; but one which to date no one has convinced us otherwise.

There is a pending list of plants that are in question but have not yet been banned. Those that in our experience we do not believe are “invasive” we continue to make available to customers who demand them. Any we believe to be potentially problematic we have pulled from inventory. We hope that common sense, science and education will eventually answer outstanding invasive debate questions and potentially debunk some of the hysteria surrounding this issue.

## **NATIVE VS. NON-NATIVE**

First, please let me please humbly postulate a definition of what constitutes a native plant: "A native plant is an indigenous plant, one originating in a given geographical area, a naturally occurring regional or endemic wild species, one component in the mix of an evolving localized wild habitat devoid of man's influence."

The issue of native versus non-native is a very complicated one. I cannot attempt to scribe a treatise on the myriad complicated aspects, some of which is contrived politically correct pseudoscience. And to all – and especially to those who believe they know all - might I suggest there is much to learn, discern and grasp. Take a deep breath and step back. We, at Quackin' Grass, certainly do not know all and probably neither do you.

Suffice it to say that we, at Quackin' Grass Nursery, do not accept the precept that only native plants are good - all others bad. The living natural world is not this simply black and white. Clearly most non-native plants are in no way an invasive threat; in actuality it is but a handful of bad characters that could be considered problematic in any given region of North America. And though controversial, even heretical by some standards, when ignoring the hot spotlight of zealous purism and puritanical presupposition which often is not science-based, some non-natives may actually enhance a habitat. Once again, the example of the previously cited *Rosa rugosa*, Beach Tomato or Beach Rose (not to be confused with Multiflora Rose) comes to mind. Also, some exotics that are a perceived problem in northeastern North America are not at issue elsewhere; the list of problem plants changes as one moves from one environment to a different habitat in this large, complex land mass, each area sometimes having multiple, differing habitats and life communities.

“Native” is intrinsically centric to where you live. But the way the word has been applied deepens the murk and noise. I will cite but three examples from the centric point of northeastern Connecticut in this burgeoning category - these are among an extraordinary number, too many to name here. Three examples of oft cited native plants which are not are Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and Smooth Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*). These plants hail from more southerly habitats than our own; though hardy for us these three are, nevertheless, not components of our native woodland mix. They cannot be construed or characterized as “native”. We consider these among many others to be “near native”. By honing definitions we can achieve better communication and, perhaps, pragmatic understanding in hopes of interjecting some small foothold upon the quagmire of this debate.

Closer to my New England home is *Vaccinium macrocarpum*, Cranberry. This is a great plant found on Cape Cod. It is not “native” to we who live in the northeastern Connecticut hills and woodlands. It will grow for us in a well-chosen cultivated habitation. If Quackin' Grass was situated on Cape Cod then I could refer to Cranberry as genuinely “native”. More broadly, *Vaccinium macrocarpum* is native in New England but perhaps not in every New England state and certainly not in every distinct habitat. But even here the definition of “native” erodes, becoming opaque and increasingly meaningless in this broader context. The word “native” is intrinsically centric to where one lives and all that naturally has evolved in the habitat(s) and environs at that particular point of being without the meddling hand of man. To sum up: if one designates a particular plant as native but that species does not grow naturally, wildly in an evolving

interrelated habitat sans the meddlesome hand of man in the espousing individual's locality then that species is not native. Near native, North American, or even New World would be more intellectually honest.

Because of our take on nativity we have opted to relegate our catalog offerings to the actual regions and continents from which they originate. Or in the case of hybrids, etc. - those created and / or selected by man as being of Garden Origin. We feel this serves our customers in a clean, truthful fashion. Though, at Quackin' Grass, our system of plant designation may not be perfect after careful consideration we believe it to be an honest attempt to apply reason, truth and integrity.

On a related topic the seemingly sane on-the-surface "logic" that only native plants support native insect, bird and animal populations is one of the more mind-numbing presuppositions masquerading as scientific fact we have yet heard. If only native plants support native animal and bird populations then how is it that the seed of Japanese Barberry, Oriental Bittersweet, Russian Olive and Multiflora Rose spread far and wide so quickly in invasive fashion in southern New England and beyond? The answer: simply because birds and mammals forage the fruit of these plants for food whose flowers had been previously pollinated in most instances by various insects and native bees plus honeybees.

Anecdotally, in our plantings at Quackin' Grass we have multitudinous populations of flourishing native bees, bee flies, butterflies, ants, wasps, some beetles (those that forage for nectar) and all manner of insect feasting on nectar produced by both native, near native and non-native plants, herbaceous and woody - most, if not all of these produce seed, berries or fruit. As Professor Jonathan Lehrer rhetorically stipulated: "Have you ever seen *Aralia elata* buzzing with multitudes of pollinating insects when it flowers?" And it is a fact that one can hear the cacophony from many feet away on a warm summer day. *Aralia elata* is not native to eastern Connecticut but does help to support a wide range of native insect populations. Excepting the handful of species which have evolved in specified and extremely precarious "mutualism" it is as if all insects, birds and mammals are so rigidly adapted that they cannot, will not or do not adapt to new dinner opportunities, native or otherwise. This has not been our experience at Quackin' Grass.

Yet, there are some zealots on the "native only" bandwagon with blaring bullhorns espousing logical sounding counterfeit "facts". They report and write and speak loudly as if actual scientific studies support narrowly contrived and rationalized conclusions. Too often these are largely if not entirely unsubstantiated. Those making such claims are impostors with a prejudiced presumption at the heart of the supposition. They will say nearly anything, proven or not, to bolster their biased point of view. They merely add to the cacophony of noise and inscrutable murk clouding much of this debate. They do us all disservice. Beware of this pseudoscience masquerading as actual, provable fact. This tactic is unfortunately rampant in the arena of native vs. non-native.

Even if there were at the time of this writing specific controlled studies researching native insects', birds' and mammals' rejections of non-native plants (again excepting "mutualism") the results would likely illuminate lighter rather than darker opaque shades of gray - not the sharp outlines of settled science.

Now to add to the complexity of this debate take into account that all environments change through time. Natural habitats remain static for no man even in the most stable of climate periods. And with global warming thrown into the mix the complications and speed at which altered states may occur is mind boggling. Already, as an example, our emblematic Sugar Maples at the southern end of their natural range in Connecticut are trending northward as they find it increasingly difficult to live well and healthfully in southern New England.

Add another layer to the extraordinary complexity is the role of changing hydrology as humans pressure more and more this fundamental natural resource. Inherently, climate change also loops into this layer. The impacts upon water supplies we are only beginning to unfortunately experience. None other than the astute Russell Stafford intimated this crucial aspect recently relating it to a broad lack of recognition all too often ignored by those invested in the native vs. non-native debate.

As such, the issue of native vs. non-native is too often shallowly understood, or should I say misunderstood, through the myopic viewing of a single fragmented ray of colored light rather than viewing all the colored rays integrally connected one to the other in the complete spectrum. Red, for instance, comes into close-up focus without seeing orange, yellow, green, blue and violet - all integral components in the makeup of the ray's totality. Take a deep breath. Step back. It is necessary to understand the entire prism, its collection of rays and their relationships to each other and how the totality of ray and how it may be projected to pass through time before anything approaching hard judgment can be fairly applied. And that hard judgement must be based in actual fact derived through the rigor of science. We, at Quackin' Grass Nursery, have no desire to add to the politically correct trumped-up noise surrounding the issue of nativity. Nor do we buy into the imposed pseudoscience which is a hierarchy of hot ether obfuscating the search for truth. We strive for light and reason. And when we are proven incorrect we admit it, make a course adjustment and move forward.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE - GLOBAL WARMING**

This is an issue finally gaining traction, growing less controversial each and every day. Acceptance is timely. Agreement to alter use of carbon-based energies and to better control methane grows short... We strongly believe in the science surrounding the issue of climate change. We believe that this is the predominant threat to the continuance of life as we know it on planet Earth. Its urgency supersedes by light years the issue of invasive plants.

We implore conservationists and native-only advocates to adopt a more universal approach, to please pluck your heads out of warming soils, so to speak, and take the larger, longer view. We all must consider carefully and objectively the increasing roster of anecdotes which have evolved into alarming trends, the voluminous and increasing body of scientific facts surrounding this looming threat upon the threshold of our world. If one does so objectively then you must agree that it is of the greatest import that we, as a group - that we, the people, demand that our leaders address this approaching disaster.

Enacting legislation and policies that will enable the decrease of CO2 and methane emissions thereby replacing them with clean, green technologies is of tantamount importance. We must pressure our leaders. It can and must be done. And our

leaders must engage the political entities of all sovereign nations in finding sensible and real consensus in lowering emissions. We must work globally to embrace policies and strategies that are best for all of life in the long term.

If one agrees that Global Warming aka Climate Change trumps all potential environmental disasters then it makes sense to table for the present the myopic rhetoric surrounding invasive plants (except for the handful of species considered most extreme in negative impact such as kudzu for example) and instead turn our attention and energy towards active involvement in the issue of climate change. It is folly to think that Climate Change will not affect and alter the woodlands and, indeed, all habitats as we have historically known them to be. In the most stable of climate periods the woodlands stand still for no one. Climate Change will alter all and in some cases drastically. If we do not grapple with the looming issue of Climate Change the quick destruction of the web of life in its miraculous complexity will be our doing. It's already beginning. And we will have done it to ourselves and our children.

I apologize for the "preachy" character of the above texts. We at Quackin' Grass as a green entity, on the ground as it were, are concerned, even worried that a global catastrophe is in the making. We like life more or less as it is. And we would prefer a green field with a few invasives salted in among the native and evolving mix demonstrating the meddlesome hand of man in its making than all of life in a downward spiral with no chance of remission. As a dear friend recently queried, "Would you rather have a field of plants with some invasives growing in the mix or another asphalt parking lot?" Thank you for your kind indulgence.