Guidance
Plant Biosecurity

Number 1 – Sourcing Plants

Recommended practice

Overview
This document provides guidance on how to reduce the risks of introducing pests and disease into gardens through careful selection of plants and suppliers.
This document provides recommended practice only.

Target Audience
This guidance applies to members of staff, volunteers and those managing volunteers.

Background
1.0 National Trust (NT) gardens acquire plants for a range of purposes, including as new accessions to collections, to re-stock gardens, for seasonal bedding, and to sell to the public through retail outlets. Plants are obtained from a wide range of sources including from commercial nurseries at home and abroad, local nurseries, NT nurseries, other NT Gardens and as donations from members, volunteers and the public.

Brought-in plants are the single most important way in which pests and diseases are introduced into a garden, therefore, it is essential that we take sensible precautions to reduce the risk of inadvertently introducing pests and diseases through this route. Below are some guiding principles that should be considered when sourcing plants:

1.1 Sourcing within UK and locally
• Wherever possible, source plants propagated and grown in the UK as these pose a lower risk of introducing pests and diseases into our gardens than plants propagated and produced outside the UK.
• UK-grown plants are also likely to be better acclimatised to our conditions and minimise transport distances.

1.2 Plant type
• Wherever possible, avoid large, semi-mature specimen trees as they pose a high risk of introducing pests and diseases into our gardens. These are often produced on the continent with the additional associated risks. For example, imported mature oaks from continental Europe are suspected to have been the
source of oak processionary moth (Thaumetopoea processionea) infection into West London.

1.3 Donated plants
• Although well-intentioned, these plants do pose a high risk of introducing pests and diseases in to our gardens.
• Consider very carefully all such offers, and if there is a specific need for such plants then they should go through ‘quarantine’ or separation for 6 weeks on arrival as specified in Plant Health Instruction. Nb. With donated plants where there is a chance that they are of recent wild origin, it is also important to comply with legislation on access and benefit sharing (the Nagoya Protocol) by ensuring that prior informed consent has been given for their collection and distribution.

1.4 Develop supplier relationships where possible
• Where possible, source plants from nurseries and garden centres that have a proven track record.
• Visit your supplier to see their operation - see the guidance below on things to look for when visiting.
• Specify exact requirements on our purchase order forms.
• If there is a specific need for plants from an unfamiliar supplier, then they should go through a separation or ‘quarantine’ procedure on arrival.

2.0 Examples of best practice at a well-managed supplier

2.1 Nursery infrastructure (glasshouses, paths, mypex, gravel, benches, support wiring etc.)
*Look for:* well-maintained facilities in a good state of repair; clean glass, no missing panes, no old plants, plant debris and weeds, no signs of drainage or flooding problems on growing areas or paths.

2.2 Plant husbandry and health of plants
*Look for:* healthy, vigorous plants; plants not growing in puddles, plants not fallen over (when they can pick up pathogens from the soil); correct watering and nutrition – no signs of deficiencies, not pot bound, not too soft; no signs of pests and diseases – no dieback, leaf spotting, root browning, no visible insect infestation or sooty moulds (a sign of honeydew from insect damage).

2.3 Watering/irrigation
*Look for:* mains or borehole supply; water abstracted from streams, ponds or recycled should be subject to testing and disinfection (e.g. chlorination or slow sand filtration); preference for low level irrigation (drip-point watering) and preferably not overhead irrigation that can spread pathogens; end of season disinfection of irrigation lines; replacement/ disinfection of capillary matting.

2.4 Quarantine/hygiene
Look for: evidence that staff are trained in plant pests and diseases – you could ask a couple of relevant questions; leaflets and posters in the tea room; evidence that they have a quarantine procedure to handle bought-in material – plants checked on arrival, kept separate in a secure quarantine area on arrival, checked regularly; the quarantine area is away from the main production area and public access, is secure etc.; plants are checked regularly; good end of season clean-up, disinfection of benches, beds etc.; staff disinfect boots and equipment regularly.

2.5 Documentation
Look for: delivery notes to confirm plants comply with all necessary plant health legislation; plant passport number (this should be on their delivery notes and will look something like “EC Plant Passport UK/EW 12345”); name of their supplier and origin of material.

2.6 Source/origin of their plants (their provenance)
Look for: evidence that they know where their plants come from - ask them specifically where they source their plants from and where their suppliers source their plants from.

2.7 Waste management
Look for: safe disposal of infested material by burning, removal to landfill; covering of waste prior to removal; any waste tips are sited well away from production areas with no risk of water movement from the tip to production areas.

2.8 Pesticides
Look for: a responsible use of pesticides; for high importance perennial plant material, consider a contract clause that the plants have not been sprayed for 6 weeks prior to supply because of the risk that they may mask infection – if in place, check their pesticide records for compliance.

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Guidance Note No. 1 Date of issue: December 2008.
Reviewed August 2015.