



## Teaching and Learning Landscape Plant Materials

As a business owner or an employee learning new plants can increase your marketability and make the work you do more interesting. Knowing your plants and having employees who know theirs increases the professionalism of your company.

There are two steps to learning and teaching plants to others, learning to identify them and learning the scientific names. This handout gives you some suggestions on how to do both.

### IDENTIFYING PLANTS

- **Pay close attention to what the major identifying features of a plant are including the leaves, buds, twigs, form and bark.**
- **Do not learn or teach a plant by just one feature because you can get fooled that way.** Leaves can look different on a sapling than they do on a mature plant and they aren't there in the winter. Look at the bark, the buds, the twigs and other features.
- **When you have a group of plants that are similar compare them to each other.** - Sugar Maple which is easily confused with Norway Maple has buds that look like sugar cones. Norway Maple buds are rounded, and turn purplish in the winter.
- **Have a plant of the week and post its picture and features on a bulletin board that everyone looks at.**
- **Quiz yourself or your employees on the job.** Try learning or teaching others a plant a day or a plant a week. Keep reviewing the plants you have learned or taught. If you have a plants person in your company give them the job of teaching people.
- **Have a plant identification competition once or twice a season and give a nice prize to the winner.**
- **Have employees or yourself take a plant identification course. This is a way of learning many plants quickly.** After a person has a plant knowledge base it is easy for them to build on it and they tend to learn new plants quickly. There are course available through, NHLA, The Thompson School of Applied Science, NHTI and plant societies.
- **Convey your enthusiasm for plants to your employees,** by teach them interesting facts about the plants.
- **Take your crew or yourself to a botanical garden for a field trip.** Close ones include Tower Hill Botanic Garden in Boylston, Mass; Garden in the Woods in Framingham Mass; Fuller Gardens in Rye, New Hampshire, The Fells in Newbury, New Hampshire and many others.
- **Use Hortiopia or another plant selection program to review.** You can quiz yourself or your employees with the program and you can print out pictures of each plant and put them in a binder.
- **Encourage your employees to become Certified Landscape Professionals.** They will learn a comprehensive list of plants used in the landscape industry in NH.

## LEARNING THE SCIENTIFIC NAMES

- **It is important for a person who works in the horticulture industry to learn the scientific names of plants.** Knowing them and using them when talking to nurseries and designers gives you a professional image and increases the likelihood of getting the plants that you want from a nursery.
- **Learning scientific names is easier for some people and harder for others.** It has to do with learning styles. However just because it might be more difficult for you doesn't mean you can't do it.
- **Methods for learning scientific names.** Some work for some people and some work for others
  1. ***Write the names over and over.*** This is most effective if you read the list several times and then break it down into several sections. Then quiz yourself on the first part by covering over the scientific names and trying to write them down. Correct your answers and then try again until you learn all the plants in the section. Then go on to the next section. At the end quiz yourself on the whole list. *For the tough names* –try making up a silly phrase about the name -I remember Smokebush -Cotinus coggygia by the phrase *smoke is continually clogging my chimney.*

*Writing the names down helps you learn the spelling*
  2. ***Flash cards-*** put the scientific name on one side and the common name on the other. Adding a picture to one side can be helpful.
  3. ***Tape player*** –Say the common name on the tape and then leave a pause and then say the scientific name and the family. This is good if you are a commuter.
  4. ***Learn the meaning of some of the words*** in scientific names such as rubrum (red), cordate (heart shaped) nana (dwarf) etc. This will help you associate the name with the plant.

***Plants are amazing-Have fun learning them !***

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