

Want tips for going Green around your home?
According to these plant professionals, buying local is a growing trend.

The Local Landscape

Story and Photos By
Joe McFarland

It's a guiding principle for business growth: Always give customers what they want.

But what happens when customers want something they might later regret—along with their neighbors and the adjoining landscape? For those in the landscaping and plant business, staying Green while giving customers what they want these days requires a healthy dose of diplomacy. Plant-supplying businesses represent a front line of defense against the spread of invasive plants in Illinois, so educating customers about the risks associated with planting invasive species is now an ethical obligation.

“One of the things my father would ask about any new plant being introduced was, ‘Will it spread?’” recalls Trent Mohlenbrock, who opened his landscaping and garden supply business in Williamson County 20 years ago. His father, now retired, is well-known Illinois plant biologist Robert



Utilizing a mix of primarily native plants, along with non-invasive exotics, landscapers can create Earth-friendly gardens that are easy to maintain and won't spread. Trent Mohlenbrock offers customers at his Marion landscape center plenty of options for growing Green.

Mohlenbrock, a native plant expert and author of numerous reference books about Illinois flora. At Trent Mohlenbrock's business, he simply will not sell any plant with a questionable lifestyle, even if it means not giving customers what they want.

“Why sell them a plant they might later regret buying?” is one of Mohlenbrock's business-growth philosophies.

Ditto for northern Illinois landscape designer Bob Grassly, who tactfully steers his clients toward native, non-invasive plant arrangements for their landscaping plans. In a competitive business field where showy and unusual plants can win over customers, Grassly draws the line when those customer-

luring plants are known to be invasive. What's more, by selecting clever combinations of spectacular, native plants, he can please customers with easy-to-maintain plants while doing right by nature. He calls it a win-win choice for both clients and the environment.

“It's really giving them what they want when I recommend local, native plants,” Grassly explained. “The plants that are native to the region often do well without requiring a lot of care. People like plants they can put in the ground and forget about, and a lot of native plant choices can do that.”

How can everyone join this Earth-friendly business effort to reduce the spread of invasive species in Illinois? Buy landscaping plants only from reputable dealers who honestly know the native flora for your region. Know that, just because a store—even a chain megastore—has plants for sale doesn't mean those plants are not dangerously invasive species.

Be wary. Be smart. Be Green with your green.

