

STANDARDS FOR NATIVE PLANT NURSERIES

by Joseph Cascio

I believe the time is right to self-enforce the National Standards in Florida's nursery industry. Let's promote standardization within the native plant industry.

It may be premature to announce that the native plant industry has arrived, but it can't be far behind. We need to shape up, for this whole exciting surge could dissipate if agencies, landscape architects, and other users are frustrated by great diversity of quality and size within a size specification.

Let's adopt the American Standard for Nursery Stock — sponsored by AAN since 1923, and approved by American National Standards Institute (ANSI) — as the horticultural standards for native Florida plant materials.

Standards for young plants, understock, and reforestation seedlings are already available for adoption or revision, in addition to the standards for landscape-sized material.

If provisions in these standards don't fit south Florida natives, add a special section on tropicals, if appropriate. Palms have been added since I sent in Terry Mock's "standards for native stock" which I handed out at the First Annual South Florida Conference on Native Plants in 1982.

Standard size, standard quality. We have all seen the wide differences in size and quality available to someone specifying plants by container size only. These differences help no one but the discounter, and weaken the professional image of the nursery industry. If you list by can size, supplement the listing by stating height and spread and caliper, as the rest of

the states have done voluntarily for over fifty years.

Collected native material. "Collected trees, from native stands or established plantings, must be so designated. The spread of roots of . . . collected trees shall be $\frac{1}{3}$ greater than the spread of roots of . . . nursery grown trees.

"Trees collected from wild or native stands may be considered nursery grown when they have been successfully re-established in the nursery row and grown under regular nursery cultural practice for a minimum of two *growing seasons* and have attained adequate root and top growth to indicate full recovery from transplanting into the nursery row." (American Standard for Nursery Stock, AAN, ANSI, Z60.1-1986.)

When we dig collected material to go directly to a development site, the balls must be over-sized. The fly-by-nighters digging wild trees with tiny balls will put themselves out of business if we build a strong industry, with quality plants, whether collected or nursery grown.

Nursery-grown native plant material. We have all seen the difference between a wild tree transplanted to a nursery row and a wild tree transplanted to a parking lot island. So let's firmly state that we have only nursery-grown trees for sale. The collected trees are not for sale until their vigor is restored and clearly evident, at which time they will have become "nursery-grown" by professional growers.

Push the benefits of nursery-grown material over collected material. Educate the designers and developers

that the typical 3-4" caliper collected oaks with $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ foot balls are going to look pathetic in their newly-designed parking lots and plazas for several years — the most important years of their investment and marketing program. There are plenty of examples you can photograph or show them.

For a similar price, 2-3" caliper oaks can be collected with $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ foot balls while the project is still being designed, planted in the nursery row, and grown under standard nursery practices for several growing seasons. Then when they are transplanted, at an additional charge, to the parking lots and plazas, they will be vigorous 3-4" caliper trees that will greatly enhance the developers' marketing effort. A few more dollars invested in nursery-grown native material will make a huge difference in the image of new construction, at that critical time. There is no second chance at a first impression.

The existence of an American National Standard doesn't force compliance; it only indicates a consensus of those concerned with its scope and provisions, and provides a guide for the producer, the specifier, the consumer, and the general public.

The public demand for native plant material is going to be tremendous over the next few years. Let's be ready with a product that fits our professional attitudes — a united front, a uniformly high standard of quality, and corresponding prices.

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