

# Today's GardenCenter

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Leading the Revolution in Garden Retailing



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## Smart Retailing

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Today's Garden Center's

# VARIETY CENTRAL

A fresh look at plants and merchandising driving sales • Native Plants



*Heucherella 'Golden Zebra'*



*Monarda 'Jacob Cline'*



*Eupatorium coelestinum*



*Veronica lettermanii*

## Positioning Native Plants

Are your customers asking for native plants or, at least, exploring new ways to garden? Native plants may be for them.

by Kevin Yanik, Associate Editor  
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Tim Kane was always the kind of person who doubted consumers would ever express enough interest in native plants to warrant the creation of a native plants program. A colleague of his at Pride's Corner felt differently.

"We have a person on staff here who is really into natives," says Kane, the sales, marketing and inventory manager at

Pride's Corner, a wholesale greenhouse operation in Lebanon, Conn. "He kept telling us we needed to put together a natives program. Ten years ago, I told him there's no chance on God's green earth we're ever going to put a program together like that. Only 1 percent of the population cares about natives and a



*Solidago aster*

program will never sell."

Yet, 10 years since Kane expressed doubt about a native plants program,

Pride's Corner is in its fourth year as a licensed grower for the American Beauties program for native plants. So what

changed in the years between

Kane's doubt about a program and his sincere belief in one?

"You could feel natives coming on," Kane says. "You could feel consumers wanting to do the right thing in their yards, wanting to move away from the non-sustainable."

To launch a program, Kane connected with Steve Castorani, co-founder of North Creek Nurseries, a propagation nursery in Landenberg, Pa. Castorani had been promoting environmental landscaping and native plants for 20-plus years, but he, like Kane, found natives fired up only a few diehard consumers rather than the gardening public as a whole.

Still, as time passed, Castorani found more consumers at his retail garden cen-

### Finding American Beauties

Which growers are currently producing American Beauties natives? Here's a list:

- Prides Corner Farms (Lebanon, Conn.)
- Midwest Groundcovers (St. Charles, Ill.)
- Nashville Natives (Fairview, Tenn.)
- Spring Meadow Nursery (Grand Haven, Mich.)
- North Creek Nurseries (Landenberg, Pa.)

Additionally, starting next spring, Fisher Farms (Gaston, Ore.) and Willoway Nursery (Avondale, Ohio) will be licensed growers for the American Beauties program. And more licensed growers are likely on the way.

A portion of each American Beauties sale goes to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). To date, the program has raised about \$110,000 for NWF. Learn more about American Beauties online at [ABNativePlants.com](http://ABNativePlants.com).

ter asking for native plants.

"People would come in and say they had a wet spot in their yard and wanted a solution, or they're gardening under Maple trees and wanted to put grass in," Castorani says. "You're at a dead end [as a retailer], because if someone walks into your garden center and asks about butterfly plants or plants that attract birds, they may meet the wrong person as they walk into the store."

A program like American Beauties helps clear up consumer confusion about which plants are natives and which aren't. Plus, selling plants as natives – particularly as part of a program like American Beauties – adds value to plants consumers already purchase or in which they may have future interest.

"An echinacea is an echinacea, yes, and you can sell it in a non-native capacity," Castorani says. "Or, you can say it's a good butterfly plant, the bees love

you have two different species that will naturally interbreed, and you will find hybrid populations. What people notice about these crossover populations is the plants tend to be larger, more vigorous and more floriferous. You're basically blending genetic material, and the plants are better plants."

Echinaceas are the classic example. A species like *Echinacea paradoxa*, Heims says, is the source of the yellow flowering echinacea varieties. But in nature, the plant doesn't flower for two or three years from seed.

"Initially, some early hybrids all have to have [*Echinacea*] *paradoxa* to have this color," Heims says. "The hybrids will actually bloom the first year. The problem is they put so much energy into the first year's flowers that they fail to build a decent root system."

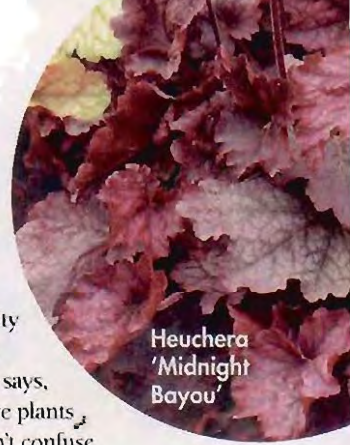
Terra Nova, therefore, takes the best aspects of the different species and

in the suburban landscape."

Biodiversity with natives is the bottom line, and a native's definition really shouldn't matter if biodiversity is being promoted. The key, Castorani says, is to promote native plants in a way that doesn't confuse consumers.

"I don't think it does a disservice to promote them differently than us," Castorani says. "It's just really important, in my mind, to connect with the consumer on a level where they can understand it. If they get it, we give them the ability to learn more about it. Empowering (gardeners) with a resource is important."

Heims agrees and sees additional ways to promote natives as solutions to envi-



Heuchera 'Midnight Bayou'



Osmunda cinnamomea



Sedum 'Crystal Pink'



Heuchera 'Autumn Bride'



Agastache 'Summer Fiesta'



Schizachyrium 'Carousel'

it and it's good for nature.

"We've been selling native plants for years without even promoting them as native plants. Now, if we can make consumers aware they're actually gardening with native plants, we can slowly turn the tide."

### The Million-Dollar Question

A small number of consumers will, however, forever debate the definition of a native plant. Was the plant native to the United States when the Europeans arrived 400-plus years ago, some native plant enthusiasts ask, or has the plant undergone alterations in a lab? The questions are legitimate and those who breed native plants all seemingly have different answers.

"If you ever look at the [USDA zonal] charts, you notice there are overlapping natives," says Dan Heims, president of Terra Nova Nurseries. "In these areas,

combines them to make plants more capable of handling stresses.

"There are varieties and species we hybridize that gain characteristics of both parents," Heims says. "One may burn to a crisp in the sun and the other may take full sun. This is how we define what's really outstanding in natives."

Castorani falls back on a different definition of natives for the American Beauties program. American Beauties defers to the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), which considers naturally occurring cultivars the true natives. NWF, in fact, worked closely with the American Beauties founders to develop criteria for plant selection.

"We chose to bring in cultivars of natives, not hybrids," Castorani says. "Some attribute that as a little more garden worthy. We really need to bring biodiversity back to our living spaces

ronmental challenges.

"I do some public speaking and do a talk on 'how dry I am,'" Heims says. "I start by explaining what's going on with the climate right now. It's scary to see some of these forecasts and what's going on. We have a situation where people need to rely on natives because they are not getting water in certain areas. Look at California: You need to fall back on plants that are native or incredibly adapted." 🌿



## More Terra Nova

Check out additional Terra Nova Nurseries native plants images in an exclusive slideshow at [TodaysGardenCenter.com](http://TodaysGardenCenter.com). Visit [TerraNovaNurseries.com](http://TerraNovaNurseries.com) for more information.