

By Carol A. Isles  
NYFB State Promotion & Education Committee

### ***The Beauty and the Beast Story of Home Gardening***

When it comes to gardening two words are changing the landscape mostly for the better, native and invasive. One involves a New York State law and the other involves a movement, and it is kind of a Beauty and the Beast story.

The NYS Law (6 NYCRR Part 575 Prohibited and Regulated Invasive Species) went into effect March 2015. This controls the sale, import, purchase, transportation, introduction and propagation of prohibited invasive plants. Clearly, these are the beasts. These non-native plants have been shown to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. But which plants are banned and what are these “regulated” plants? It seems very complicated and some gardeners are motivated enough to decide to go “native”.

And here we have the “Beauty” part of the story. The native plant movement has many supporters with many outcomes in mind. Goals like, conserving biodiversity, supporting local wildlife, providing food and habitat for butterflies and pollinators and reducing the amount of water, chemicals and fertilizers needed for the plant to thrive. It seems simple, just go native.

But like most things, it isn’t that simple. First there are natives, native cultivars and others that are not just native but Ecotypic native plants. True natives can have drawbacks in the garden too, they can be difficult to find, they have the reputation of being weedy and wild and they tend to be less uniform in size/shape. Native cultivars have been bred to bring out desirable traits but some have their own set of challenges, less adapted to local conditions, might not self-seed and may not be as attractive to pollinators.

Have heart! Like most fairytale stories, this version of Beauty and the Beast has a happy ending.

Step one: go to a reputable local nursery or garden center. They are well versed in the law and inspected regularly. A regional chain or big box store may not be compliant or even aware of the law. They may be sourcing plants in other states where there are no such restrictions. You are much better off buying local from local growers and nurseries, the New York State banned and regulated plants won’t be an issue. Local nurseries will take the confusion out of it for you. They will not carry banned plants and the handful of regulated plants will be labeled as such. Knowledgeable horticulturalists are on staff to recommend alternatives. I bet that they can even recommend native or native cultivars that can replace those evildoers.

Step two: beware of accepting homeless plants. Well-meaning neighbors are going to try and give these great plants. “They grow anywhere and do so well!” If they are giving them to you because they have taken over their yard, it is highly likely that they are legacy invasive species. Thanks, but no thanks.

Step three: by law you don’t have to remove the invasive plants on your property. If you choose to, please don’t give them to friends or throw them over the back fence. Bag them up and dispose of them properly.

The moral of the story is to buy locally grown, non-invasive garden plants that are as closed to native as you can find and that suit your needs. Go to your local grower or nursery and ask them to help you pick out the right beauties for your garden.