

The science of prevention: Risk assessment tools for ornamental plants underpin the Plant Sure Scheme and the Gardening Responsibly Initiative

Aimee Freimanis¹, Michelle R. Leishman², Victoria Graham², Guyo Duba Gufu², Claire Laws², Katherine McClellan², Samantha Newton², Hillary Cherry³, Chris O'Connor⁴

¹EcoHort Pty Ltd, Glenhaven, Australia,

²School of Natural Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia,

³NSW Dept of Planning & Environment, Parramatta, Australia,

⁴Nursery & Garden Industry NSW & ACT, Kenthurst, Australia

(hillary.cherry@environment.nsw.gov.au)

Summary Historically, the ornamental plant trade has been a significant pathway for weed introductions. For example, over 72% of environmental weeds in Australia are considered garden escapes. Strong desire exists within industry, government and the community to reduce the use of ‘weedy’ ornamental plants to prevent future weed invasions. The industry-led Gardening Responsibly initiative provides new tools to scientifically assess the invasive risk of ornamental plants, reduce the sale and use of high-risk plants and make it easier for everyone to ‘garden responsibly’. Gardening Responsibly is similar to international certification initiatives such as those of the Forest Stewardship Council and Marine Stewardship Council, that use an eco-label to identify environmentally friendly products. The Gardening Responsibly initiative aims to provide access to and increase demand for, low invasive risk ornamental garden plants. To ensure the certification eco-label is trusted and effective, it is underpinned by a robust and transparent plant risk assessment framework and categorisation process that classifies plant species and cultivars according to invasive risk. Species

assessed as a low invasive risk are promoted while species assessed as a high invasive risk do not qualify for the eco-label. The Gardening Responsibly website includes a research portal where risk assessments and categorisation protocols are freely accessible.

The Gardening Responsibly initiative is being trialled in New South Wales in 2022 and is designed for national uptake. It is open to all industries across the ‘supply chain’, including breeders, growers, sellers and plant recommenders, such as local governments and landscape architects. This presentation details: i) collaboration and co-design to build the initiative, ii) plant risk assessment and decision support tools, and iii) the accessibility of the initiative to all audiences, from backyard gardeners to professional horticulturists. The Gardening Responsibly initiative aims to ultimately elicit long-term attitudinal and behavioural change to generate positive environmental outcomes.

Keywords Environment, risk assessment, certification, ornamental plants, decision support, behaviour change, prevention