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Landscape Architects as Related to the Landscape/Nursery Industry: III. Sources of Plant Material Information[1]

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Abstract

The top five sources of information that Georgia landscape architects use to determine which plants to specify are botanical and public gardens (86.9%), landscape architects (81.6%), grower exhibits at professional meetings (69.0%), producer trade shows (68.3%), and university personnel (67.8%). The sources of information vary by size of firm with large firms having a strong preference for botanical and public gardens (58.3%) followed by producer sponsored trade journals (36.4%), producer trade shows (33.3%), and other landscape architects (25.0%). Medium sized firms have a preference for landscape architects (63.2%) and botanical and public gardens (60.0%) followed by producer trade shows (26.3%), whereas small firms are more evenly divided among information sources. The top four journals or books that landscape architects use as a source of information concerning plants vary by size of firm. The larger firms prefer two journals: (a) American Nurseryman (16.7%) and (b) Horticulture—The Magazine of American Gardening (13.3%) and two texts, Know-It Grow-It (13.3%) and Landscape Plants of the Southeast (13.3%). Medium firms prefer three texts, Landscape Plants of the Southeast (19.6%), Wyman's texts (13.1%), Know-It Grow-It (11.8%) and wholesale nursery catalogs (7.8%) as reference sources. Smaller firms have a strong preference for the Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (20.7%), followed by Extension Service publications (15.5%), Landscape Plants of the Southeast (12.1%), and trade magazines/garden catalogs (10.3%) as information sources. The preferred information sources vary by size of firm and provide valuable insight for growers developing marketing plans for landscape architects.

Index words: market research, botanical gardens, landscape architect, nursery growers

Significance to the Nursery Industry

Landscape architects influence the demand for a significant portion of plants produced in Georgia. Growers could benefit from a marketing program targeted to landscape architects. This study identifies the information sources used by landscape architects as they determine which plants to specify. The results suggest that growers should first determine the size of the target landscape architectural firm. For instance, growers that target large firms might consider placing new plants in botanical and public gardens located in the target marketing area. If a grower markets their product(s) nationally, the priority trade journals should be helpful when targeting large landscape architectural firms. Producer sponsored trade shows are widely used by all size landscape architectural firms and could be an excellent opportunity to highlight new or improved plant materials.

Introduction

Previous work (1, 2) demonstrates that landscape architects influence which plants are used in the landscape and, in Georgia, specify plant material equivalent to 42% of the value of plants grown in the state (4). Landscape architects also play a role in selection of the production nursery where the landscape contractor obtains plants (5). Therefore, nurserymen could benefit directly from marketing programs targeted to landscape architects. The marketing program will be more efficient if producers understand how landscape architects make decisions on which plants to specify.

Growers and landscape contractors often feel that other more appropriate plants, than those plants specified by the landscape architect, could have been used for a landscape project (1). In some cases, the specified plants are not available and extra time is required by the landscape architect, landscape contractor, and grower, to identify substitute plants. This adds to the cost of an installed landscape. To minimize time spent on substitutions and to assist landscape architects in specifying the most appropriate plants, greater information exchange is needed (3). A first step is to identify the current sources of plant material information used by landscape architects. This could help producers, university personnel, and others that generate plant material information to target the information sources most widely used by landscape architects.

This paper summarizes the information resources used by landscape architects in Georgia to make decisions on which plants to specify. Based on the survey results, a marketing strategy for growers to segment and target landscape architects is identified.

Materials and Methods

Surveys were mailed to 168 landscape architectural firms in Georgia in May, 1991. The survey contained a cover letter cosigned by the Marketing manager of American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and the senior author and was mailed from ASLA headquarters. A second mailing

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was sent in June, 1991. We received 62 completed forms for a 36.9% response.

The survey questions addressed in this paper (Table 1) are designed to gather insight on where landscape architects get their information on plants. The first lists plant information sources and provides a mechanism for determining how often these sources are used by landscape architects in making decisions on which plants to specify. The second is an open-end question and solicits the name of reference materials (journals or books) used by landscape architects.

Analysis of the open-end question was accomplished by: (a) listing all journals/books cited, (b) developing a code for each citation, (c) assigning the code to each response, and (d) conducting a frequency analysis for the responses. All responses are analyzed according to the size of the landscape architectural firm, based on 1990 wholesale value of plant material specified; large (≥ $1 M), medium ($200–$999 K), small (< $200 K). Data were tabulated and analysis of response was conducted using SAS (6).

Results and Discussion

The sources of information used by landscape architects to specify new or appropriate plants and the frequency of use is outlined in Table 2. The top four sources "used a lot" (Table 2) in descending order are: (a) botanical and public gardens (42.6%), (b) other landscape architects (38.3%), (c) producer trade shows (33.3%), and (d) university personnel (27.1%). The least used sources (highest response to "don't use" in Table 2) are: (a) landscape architecture professional journals (53.2%), (b) producer sponsored seminars (44.1%), (c) producer sponsored trade journals (41.4%), and (d) university personnel (32.2%). A close review of the ASLA journal, Landscape Architecture, reveals that it emphasizes design and hardgoods rather than plant materials. The results on use of university personnel (top four of "use a lot" and top four of "don't use") suggests a dichotomy among architects, where a significant number rely heavily on university personnel, and another segment makes little use of this source of information.

The most widely used sources of information become clearer when the "use a little" and "use a lot" categories are combined (Table 2). The most frequently used source is botanical and public gardens (86.9%). A close second is other landscape architects (81.6%). The next three sources with very similar frequency of usage are grower exhibits at professional meetings (69.0%), producer trade shows (68.3%), and university personnel (67.8%).

The results in Table 3 demonstrate the value of segmenting the market prior to targeting a market program. The large firms, which account for about 21% of the respondents and 67% of the plant material specified (4), have a strong preference for botanical and public gardens (58.3%) as an information source for plant specification. This is followed by producer sponsored trade journals (36.4%), producer trade shows (33.3%), and landscape architects (25.0%). Producer sponsored trade journals rank 6th out of 8 resource options for the total population but is ranked 2nd by respondents from the large firms that specify much of the plant material (Table 3). The medium sized firms, which account for about 37% of respondents and 27% of the value of plant materials specified, utilize landscape architects (63.2%) and botanical and public gardens (60%) extensively (Table 3) followed by producer trade shows (26.3%) and university personnel (20.0%). The small firms, 42% of respondents and less than 6% of the value of plant materials specified, rely on producer trade shows (37.9%), university

Table 1. Survey questions.

(1) On the following scale, please rate each of the sources according to how much you use them to provide information about new/appropriate plants to specify?

	Don't use	Use a little	Use a lot
Landscape Architecture Professional Journal	1	2	3
Producer Trade Shows; i.e., SNA	1	2	3
Producer Sponsored Seminars	1	2	3
Producer Sponsored Trade Journals	1	2	3
Grower Exhibits at Professional Meetings	1	2	3
University Personnel	1	2	3
Botanical and Public Gardens	1	2	3
Landscape Architects	1	2	3

(2) Please rank the three journals/books you feel are most valuable as a source of information about plants: (1 = most valuable).

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Table 2. Sources of information used by landscape architects to specify plant material in proposed projects.

Source	% Respondents			
	Don't use	Use a little	Use a lot	Use a little and use a lot
Landscape architecture professional journals	53.2	35.5	11.3	46.8
Producer trade shows	31.7	35.0	33.3	68.3
Producer sponsored seminars	44.1	49.2	6.8	56.0
Producer sponsored trade journals	41.4	41.4	17.2	58.6
Grower exhibits at professional meetings	31.0	50.0	19.0	69.0
University personnel	32.2	40.7	27.1	67.8
Botanical and public gardens	13.1	44.3	42.6	86.9
Landscape architects	18.3	43.3	38.3	81.6

Table 3. Sources of information 'used a lot' by landscape architects to specify new/appropriate plants.

Source	Firm Size[z]		
	Small	Medium	Large
	------- Percent Response -------		
Landscape architecture professional journals	13.8	9.5	8.3
Producer trade shows	37.9	26.3	33.3
Producer sponsored seminars	10.7	0.0	8.3
Producer sponsored trade journals	10.7	15.8	36.4
Grower exhibits at professional meetings	21.4	15.8	18.2
University personnel	35.7	20.0	18.2
Botanical and public gardens	24.1	60.0	58.3
Landscape architects	27.6	63.2	25.0

[z]Based on 1990 wholesale value of plant material purchased or specified: Small (<$200 K), Medium ($200 K–$999 K), Large (≥$1 M).

personnel (35.7%), landscape architects (27.6%), and botanical and public gardens (24.1%). The medium and large firms, which account for 94% of the value of plant material specified, consider botanical and public gardens as their primary source of information for plant specification (Table 3). Producer sponsored trade shows is another important source of information and is rated as one of the top three choices by all size firms (Table 3).

To further explore information sources for plant specification, landscape architects were asked to list their three favorite journals/books (Table 4). For all firm sizes combined, the two most frequently used sources are Landscape Plants of the Southeast (14.3%) and Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (13.6%). Other frequently used sources are Extension Service publications (9.1%), Know-It Grow-It (8.4%), Wyman's texts (7.8%), and Horticulture—The Magazine of American Gardening (6.5%). The preference for journals/books varied significantly by size of firm (Table 5). The large firms prefer two journals: (a) American Nurseryman and (b) Horticulture—The Magazine of American Gardening, and two texts: (a) Landscape Plants of the Southeast and (b) Know-It Grow-It. The medium firms prefer Landscape Plants of the Southeast (19.6%), followed by Wyman's texts (13.1%), Know-It Grow-It (11.8%), and to a lesser extent wholesale nursery catalogs (7.8%). The small firms strongly favor Manual of Woody Landscape Plants (20.7%) for plant information, followed by Extension Service publications (15.5%), Landscape Plants of the Southeast (12.1%), and trade magazines/garden catalogs (10.3%). The text, Landscape Plants of the Southeast, is the only source of information used most frequently by all size firms.

The greatest differences among size of firms was in the use of trade journals and university personnel as information sources. Large firms extensively utilize producer sponsored trade journals in contrast to small and medium firms (Table 3). The small firms rely more on university personnel than do medium and large firms. These results help explain the data in Table 2 in which university personnel are rated in the top 4 by "use a lot" and "don't use" respondents. This suggests that the larger firms are not fully utilizing this source of information. A first step to increase the use of the university resource would be to develop a list of available personnel and publications that could help landscape architects decide which plants to specify. The opportunity is certainly available for university personnel to help producers by targeting appropriate information to landscape architects.

The data in this paper provide guidance to growers developing a marketing plan for landscape architects. The producers should first understand the differential use of information sources by landscape architects due to the size of their firm and then target those information sources preferred by each firm size. Nurserymen should suggest plantings to nearby botanical and public gardens as a means of facilitating the plant evaluation process by landscape architects. Furthermore, educational articles on plant use prepared by nurserymen or university personnel could be placed in appropriate trade journals. Exhibiting at grower sponsored trade shows should be beneficial since all size landscape architectural firms use these events to gather information.

Table 4. Journals and/or books used by landscape architects to a source of information on plants (all firms).

Source[z]	Respondents %	Respondents No.
Landscape Plants of the Southeast—Halfacre and Shawcroft Sparks Press, Raleigh, NC	14.3	22
Manual of Woody Landscape Plants—Dirr, Stipes Publishing, Champaign, IL	13.6	21
Extension Service publications	9.1	14
Know-It Grow-It—Whitcomb, Lacebark Pub., Stillwater, OK	8.4	13
Wyman's Texts (Trees for American Gardens, Shrubs, and Vines for American Gardens, Garden Encyclopedia)	7.8	12
Horticulture, The Magazine of American Gardening—Horticulture Limited Partnership (Publisher), Boston, MA	6.5	10
Hortus III	5.2	8
Trade magazines/garden catalogs	4.5	7
American Nurseryman magazine	4.5	7

[z]Sources that were listed by at least seven respondents.

Table 5. Journals and/or books that landscape architects indicate are the most valuable sources of information about plants.

	Firm Size[z] Small	Medium	Large
	------- Percent Response -------		
Landscape Plants of the Southeast	12.1	19.6	13.3
Manual of Woody Landscape Plants	20.7		
Know-It Grow-It		11.8	13.3
Extension Service publications	15.5		
Wyman's texts[y]		13.1	
Horticulture—The Magazine of American Gardening			13.3
American Nurseryman magazine			16.7
Trade magazines/garden catalogs	10.3		
Wholesale nursery catalogs		7.8	

[z]Based on 1990 wholesale value of plant material purchased or specified: Small (<$200 K), Medium ($200 K–$999 K), Large (≥$1 M).

[y]Includes: Trees for American Gardens; Shrubs and Vines for American Gardens; and Garden Encyclopedia.

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