

Title: Weed Suppressive Groundcovers

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Abstract:

Cornell research found certain that certain plants can be used to naturally suppress weeds. Some of these plants are attractive and represent a new market potential for NY greenhouse producers.

With funding from NYFVI we published a color brochure and website to describe these plants and promote their use to suppress weeds and reduce herbicide use in landscapes. We worked with growers and planted on-farm demonstration gardens at several locations across the state.

The brochures have been well received. They are available through the Extension system and at garden center retailers. Hundreds of New York growers are now familiar with weed-suppressive plants and the new way they may be marketed to sell more plants. Ultimately, the NY consumers purchasing these plants will benefit from having plants that perform well in their landscapes and keep down weeds without herbicides. Producers that are promoting and selling these weed suppressive groundcovers have benefited from having a new market niche.

Background and Justification:

New York greenhouse producers want to meet the demands of their customers. Many gardening consumers are now motivated to use techniques that involve less labor and fewer pesticides. The use of these weed suppressive groundcovers has the potential to help meet those needs. Research was conducted over the past six years with the intention that weed suppressive plants would be used along NY highways to reduce maintenance. However it is apparent that that there is a use for these plants in the home landscapes of New York residents and a market opportunity for NY greenhouses and garden centers.

Objectives:

This project promoted weed suppressive groundcovers both to producers, who are growing them, and the public who can use them in their landscape to suppress weeds. Any producer or retailer who grows and sells perennial plants will be able to promote these plants using the brochure and website information produced in this project. Ultimately, the New York consumers purchasing these plants will benefit from having plants that suppress weeds and from reduced herbicide use in landscapes.

Procedures:

Brochure Development: Research data on 85 plants from Long Island and Ithaca plots was screened for effectiveness in weed suppression as well as appearance. This process yielded the 14 plants that are featured in the brochure. Photographs of these plants were taken and cultural information was compiled. A graphic artist designed the brochure to have visual appeal. The brochure was posted to New York's IPM website.

http://nysipm.cornell.edu/nursery_ghouse/weed_supp_grcovers.asp

Demonstration Plots: Demonstration sites of these groundcovers were established at retail establishments and public areas in Long Island, Orange County, and the Albany, Rochester, Ithaca and Buffalo areas.

Promotion: In 2009 the plants in the groundcover demonstration gardens have grown and the matured, both at retail establishments and public locations. These have become an effective and attractive way to promote these plants to other growers and to consumers. An additional 7 presentations on weed suppressive groundcovers were delivered to growers and consumers in NY.

Results and Implications:

The response from green industry professionals was positive. The second printing of the Weed Suppressive Groundcover brochure was delivered in 2008. At this point over 12,000 copies of the brochure have been distributed.

Attendance at the open-houses at cooperators' farms was very good. We were able to combine two of these with a separate presentation on greenhouse bio control (another IPM and Farm Viability Institute sponsored project) so that growers could learn about both in one location.

Since this project began, growers are increasingly offering these plants to NY consumers. The potential herbicide saving on consumers' properties where these are being used is high.

Profitability, Competitiveness, Sustainability Improvements

Hundreds of New York growers are now familiar with weed-suppressive plants and the new way they may be marketed to sell more plants. Ultimately, the NY consumers purchasing these plants will benefit from having plants that perform well in their landscapes and keep down weeds without herbicide use. It is anticipated that these consumers will further support the producers that are promoting and selling weed suppressive groundcovers.

We anticipate greater impact of this program in coming years, but one grower has already felt that this project was a success and they were glad to have played a part in it. Lockwood's Greenhouses (Buffalo) estimate an increase in sales of approximately \$1,000.00 (1/2 % of total sales) for 2008.

A comment from the wrap-up evaluation:

"It was a feather in the cap; that is, Lockwood's prides itself in being forward-thinking, up on the newest and best plants and products and research information. So it was a fine credit to us that we had a Cornell demonstration and research plot. It added to our credibility. Also, specifically it helped salespeople sell perennials as groundcovers." --Sally Cunningham project coordinator at Lockwoods Greenhouses.

- This project made information easily available to growers: 2,300 growers and green industry professionals heard about these plants directly through presentations delivered at grower meetings.
- The growers (100% as indicated by a final survey) involved with this project agreed or strongly agreed that the brochure created through this project provided useful information for customers and employees and this project increased their awareness of perennials that can be weed suppressive. This sets the stage for growers to increase production and promote the sales of these plants.

Outreach

- This project made the Weed Suppressive Groundcover brochure, website and powerpoint presentation possible, which made Cornell research available to growers and New York homeowners.
- Over 12,000 copies of the brochure have been distributed to date. A powerpoint presentation based on this project has been presented at 28 venues. A total of 2,300 New York growers, landscape horticultural professionals and homeowners heard about this project directly through one of these 28 presentations.

Industry Changes

- New York growers now have access to information that could increase their sales of certain perennials. The brochures have been appreciated by growers and are now being distributed to New York consumers. Some pull-through effects will likely be felt as there is increased demand for these plants.

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Farm Success Stories

- Baker's Acres: From wrap-up evaluation:
Strongly agree that the brochure created by this project provided useful information for customers and employees. Regarding the demonstration plot: "...when customers saw the trial garden they were inspired"
- For Lockwood's Greenhouses new perennials they tried as a result of this project: Sedum 'John Creech', Aster 'Snow Flurry', Solidago 'Golden Fleece'.
- Deborah Sweeton of Techni-Growers Greenhouses indicated: She is glad she participated and is sure this project will be helpful to her business in the future. Really just starting to promote her demonstration site to her customers. From a site visit, May 2009, Deborah said " I am really excited about this project."
- Becker's Farm: From wrap-up evaluation:
Strongly agree that the brochure and information from this project provided useful information for customers and employees.
"Customer awareness has been realized as a result of this project."