

Benefits of Having a Nursery Program

The landscape business overlaps considerably with the nursery business and thus benefits from our (MDA's) oversight of the nursery industry. There is a substantial and general benefit to the landscape industry in being able to rely on MDA's inspection of nursery stock to ensure that their plant material is free of diseases and pests, true to type, and properly labeled. This alone is sufficient to justify the landscape industry being included in the nursery program's fee structure. They derive a benefit from the nursery program, and thus they should help fund it.

Being included in the nursery industry also provides a number of specific benefits to the landscape industry.

- 1) We provide a level playing field through regulatory oversight and compliance assistance. All of the landscaping businesses follow the same set of rules regarding quarantines, noxious weeds, and licensing. It would be very difficult for the average nursery or landscape owner to maintain complete familiarity with all federal and state quarantine actions, weed classifications, compliance agreements, and interstate compacts and still have time to run a business. Our inspections provide specific guidance tailored to the business at hand, and assistance in complying with all applicable regulations.
- 2) Alleged violations are investigated by a disinterested and expert third party. Any enforcement actions are carried out within an already agreed upon regulatory framework, and are subject to the full protection of due process.
- 3) Our nursery inspection program ensures that plants marketed to consumers through the landscape industry are clean, properly identified and labeled, and free of diseases and pests that may pose a risk to the consumer or to Montana's agricultural industry. Beth recently inspected a "big-box" store after a report that they were selling Scotch broom, a noxious weed. Upon inspection it was determined that the plants in question were a different cultivar, not a noxious weed. The experience of other states with the introduction of noxious weeds through nursery and landscaping channels (e.g. cogon grass and *Phragmites* in the Southeast) emphasizes the importance of these kinds of public-service activities.
- 4) We monitor emerging and expanding pests nationally and internationally to prevent them from entering Montana. Our inspections have thus far prevented diseases such as chrysanthemum rust and boxwood blight from entering Montana. Japanese beetle has been introduced to Montana several times through the importation of ornamental nursery stock, but our quarantine and inspection programs have thus far prevented it from becoming widespread. The nursery and landscape industries are the front lines for this pest, and maintaining a presence in this arena is vital to the success of our continuing control efforts.
- 5) We coordinate with other states to ensure that invasive pests and pathogens do not affect the nursery, landscape, or agricultural industries in Montana. We have worked with Minnesota to stop the importation of Japanese beetle to Montana. We have worked with Arizona to stop the importation of noxious weeds via the aquarium trade. We coordinate closely with Colorado and other states with established emerald ash borer or Asian longhorn beetle populations to prevent the importation of these devastating pests into Montana. (The nursery, landscape, or arboriculture industries are where many of these pests first become apparent. It is vital that we maintain a close working relationship with these industries.) We have access to quarantines, stop-sale orders, and other regulatory tools to protect consumers and businesses from these pests.
- 6) We provide outreach and education on identification and detection, critical control points, and best management practices for weeds, insect pests, parasites and diseases for all nursery and landscape businesses, large and small. The level of expertise provided by MDA is simply not available (or not affordable) for the vast majority of small and medium-sized nursery and landscape businesses.