

## Protection or profits?

COLUMNS - VIEWPOINT

A California group is asking nurseries and garden centers to take a new plant out of rotation.

KELLI RODDA | July 17, 2014



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PlantRight is a California organization whose mission is to address the ongoing sale of invasive garden plants in California. The group takes a collaborative approach to the invasive species issue, which in other parts of the country is often wrought with discord. PlantRight works closely with the nursery and landscape industries, as well as university researchers and conservationists to keep invasive plants out of California's landscapes and wilderness areas.

Its latest goal is to stop the sale of Mexican feathergrass or *Nassella (Stipa) tenuissima*.

PlantRight added this species of feathergrass to its list of "problem plants" this year, around the time growers and retailers were getting ready to sell it through the supply chain. The organization is trying a new approach to stop the sale of this plant in California. According to PlantRight, one of the top growers of Mexican feathergrass has 14,000 plants in the production pipeline ready to ship to 200 nurseries throughout the state. But the nursery is "willing to forgo profit and sell them at cost to PlantRight," the organization reported. The grower has stopped all production of this plant, is helping dispose of it in an environmentally responsible fashion, and is helping PlantRight educate the largest retailers in the country.

According to PlantRight's estimates, if 14,000 Mexican feathergrass plants were placed in California landscapes, the plants would produce more than "980 million seeds and untold millions of invasive progeny."

In another interesting twist, PlantRight took to [Fundrazr.com](http://Fundrazr.com), an online fundraising campaign portal, to help pay for the 14,000 plants. The goal was to raise \$10,000, and at press time, PlantRight had raised \$3,300.

I'm impressed with how the grower and PlantRight worked together in a cohesive manner instead of a confrontational one. Some of the state-run invasive species councils could take a lesson from this "partnership" model. Too often, some invasive species groups don't seek input from the green industry and end up causing more harm than good.

Growers, it's important that you engage open dialog with these types of groups. Offer to help with trials or testing sites. Make sure you're regularly attending invasive species meetings and being a consistent voice for the nursery industry. Don't be the agitator that shows up at the last minute, be a collaborator that helps through the entire process.

**Editor's note:** Hat-tip to AmericanHort's Craig Regelbrugge for bringing this to the industry's attention.

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