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Awareness and Demand for Native Ornamental Plants in the Nursery Industry of Sri Lanka: A Case Study from Diyatha Flower Market

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Abstract

Native plants, whose establishment is restricted to a certain geographical area and are well adapted to the local environment, are considered an important component of plant biodiversity. Owing to their unique properties which help directly and indirectly to enhance biodiversity, natives are recommended to be used for landscaping and restoration. Despite their functional value, natives are not readily available in the market as opposed exotic plants. Even though Sri Lanka is rich of native flora, the tendency towards the use of native plants in Sri Lanka is relatively low. Therefore this study is focused to assess the potential, availability and knowledge of plant sellers on native plants. The study was carried out in Diyatha Flower Market (DFM) with a sample of 109 sellers using a pre-tested questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of social and demographical information, knowledge on native plants, sales and production information, constraints, suggestions and future potential. The association between native plant knowledge and demographic factors of the sellers were measured by the Pearson chi square test. The results highlighted that the majority of respondents were not aware about native plants whilegender, age, civil status, experience in the plant industry and experience in DFM were not associated with the level of knowledge on native plants. Only the educational level was significantly associated with native plant knowledge ($p=0.011$). The respondents with diploma, degree and postgraduate qualifications have indicated a 100% positive response for the knowledge about native plants. Eventhough 49% of the plant sellers have a moderate to high knowledge level on native plants, there is no demand for native ornamental plants from the customers hence sellers do not sell native plants at DFM. This is evident by the dearth of such plants in residential and public gardens. Hence at the DFM, which is the largest flower market in Sri Lanka, none of the plant sellers possess native ornamental plants. However, the native ornamental plant market is an emerging and fast growing industry in developed countries. Nevertheless 10% of the plant sellers engaged on native fruit and medicinal plant sales. According to plant sellers, main barriers to introduce native ornamental plants were unfamiliarity about native plants and lack of demand from customers. Hence it is vital to educate general public on potential benefits of native plants in view of promoting native plants in the landscape industry in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Diyatha flower market, Landscape industry, Native ornamental plants

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Proceedings of the 24th International Forestry and Environment Symposium 2019 of the Department of Forestry and Environmental Science, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka

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