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**Awareness, Practice and Perception of General Public using Native Plants for Landscaping:
A Case Study from Diyatha Flower Market**

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Abstract

A native plant is a species indigenous to a given region or ecosystem hence occurring naturally in a given area. The contribution attired by native plants ranges from conservational purposes to aesthetics. At present, landscaping using native plants is a major constituent in sustainable industries, which is highly popular owing to its capability to improve the ecological significance of the environment. Even though Sri Lanka has a vast pool of native plants, the tendency towards purchasing and using native plants are relatively low. Since the lack of knowledge and the small market create a divergence, exotics are used and maintained unknowingly at the residential level. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the consumers' knowledge, attitude, and practices on using native plants at Diyatha Flower Market of Sri Lanka. A pre-tested interviewer administrated questionnaire was used to collect socio-demographic information, knowledge, attitudes and practices of respondents (n=147) on the usage of native plants in landscaping. Five points Likert scale was used to rank the attributes and the association between purchasing native plants and demographic factors, knowledge, attitude, the practice of the respondents was measured by Pearson chi square test. According to the results, purchasing native plants for landscaping was influenced by several factors; occupation ($p=0.034$), practising of landscaping ($p=0.003$), attitudes ($p=0.049$) and the respondents' knowledge ($p=0.008$) on native plants. Gender, age and educational level did not significantly correlate to purchasing behaviour, while limited diversity (61.9%), lack of knowledge (51.7%), and unavailability of native plants in the market (29.9%) were reported as the major causes for not purchasing native plants. Only 3.4% indicated insect attraction as a reason for purchasing native plants, implying the lack of interest in wildlife gardening/pollinator conservation concepts in Sri Lanka. A notably higher percentage of respondents had a moderate level of knowledge (49.6%) on natives. However, 42% of respondents denote low preference of using natives at the home garden level through majority of participants showed a highly favorable level of attitudes (91.1%) towards natives. This proved that people support native plants in general but lack of using the native species at the residential level. Hence, enhancing the knowledge and attitude of using native plants among the general public and encouraging research and extension work to popularize native species for landscaping is recommended.

Keywords: Diyatha flower market, Landscaping, Knowledge, Native plants, Public perception