

NURSERY PAPERS

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Plant labelling – The first point of contact in knowing about the plant

For those without significant horticultural knowledge, a plant label is an effective way of establishing the name of a plant, information about its attributes and cultural requirements. It is also effective in advertising a plant and achieving a sale for those who have produced and/or promoted it.

Plant labelling also serves to support the claims of those selling a plant and provides a specific linkage to traceability of it should there be a need to address plant performance (e.g., is it a weed?) and/or biosecurity issues associated with a species which may be subject to exotic plant pests.

In this Nursery Paper NGIA Environmental & Technical Policy Manager, Dr Anthony Kachenko and NGINA Industry Development Officer, Michael Danelon outline the importance of the NGIA National Plant Labelling Guidelines (NPLG).



Plants labelled for sale - Landscape Link, VIC.

Plant labelling – The first point of contact in knowing about the plant

The Nursery and Garden Industry supply plants to a wide range of sectors ranging from: garden centres, landscaping, commercial horticulture, forestry, re-vegetation and the interior/indoor trade.

Traditionally, the requirement for including a plant label with the plant/pot being sold varied according to the end user and their knowledge of the plant and individual needs.

Plants which are sold to the general public typically contain some form of individual plant labelling. Driving the uptake of plant labels is the lack of horticultural knowledge among the general public which has seen more and more labels appear on each plant or seedling container. Essentially, this allows the purchaser to at least identify the plant they are seeking to purchase. The plant label is also a useful vehicle to advertise aspects of the plant through imagery to showcase features which are only present for a short period of time, e.g. flowers/fruit, shape and colour.

A commercial grower may seek to have one plant label for a batch of plants to

ensure they are segregating the batch for commercial management. Labelling of each unit is more often the case for plants being sold at a retail garden centre.

Wider issues to consider when going down the pathway of plant labelling relate to statutory regulations. That is, the requirements for plant labels to contain certain pieces of information that adhere to state and territory legislation governing the movement of plants within and across state and territory borders.

Some government regulatory bodies require plant consignments entering state/territory jurisdictions to be clearly identified with the botanical name to ensure they are meeting their quarantine/biosecurity (plant health/quarantine and permitted plants) and noxious/declared weed obligations.

Not only is the identification of the plant becoming a requirement in some areas of Australia, but the need to trace forward or trace back movements (transport) of a nominated plant is gaining momentum across all levels of government. The ability to trace specific plant movements will assist

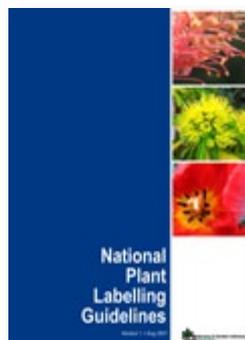
in the early detection and management of exotic plant pests. Without identification (labelling), the ability of Government and Industry to respond in the event of an incursion is significantly jeopardised.

The Federal Government have long considered the benefits of a mandatory plant labelling scheme in order to better inform consumers about potentially invasive plants. More recently, issues surrounding plant health certification and interstate plant movement has ensured mandatory plant labelling remains firmly on the agenda.



Aquatic plants with clear labels – Poyntons of Essendon, VIC.

NGIA National Plant Labelling Guidelines



The NGIA National Plant Labelling Guidelines were developed to provide industry with information on how to provide sufficient information on plant labels.

In August 2007, to address the Federal Government's concern with regards to plant labelling, Nursery & Garden Industry Australia developed National Plant Labelling Guidelines (NPLG). These voluntary guidelines were developed to provide industry with guidance in how to provide clear, unambiguous and accurate information on plant labels.

In developing these guidelines, NGIA was mindful that the guidelines had to effectively communicate to those responsible what information was considered pertinent to enable consumers to make informed plant purchasing

decisions. The intent was to reduce confusion in relation to the content of labels used on plants and marketing material. In addition, these guidelines aimed to provide a way to minimise risk to the consumer and those in contact with the plant, similar to the warning label "caution contents hot" on the lids of hot beverages.

The NPLG were developed by the Nursery Industry in conjunction with the Tree & Shrub Growers Victoria and a legal team with a specialist interest in intellectual property within the nursery industry. The guidelines are voluntary and applicable to all plant producers, suppliers of plant material, plant retailers and label manufacturers. The nursery industry encourages all sectors to adopt these guidelines, particularly in an environment with rising emphasis on regulation and onus on industry to 'do the right thing'.

Within the NPLG, the definition of a label is "Any tag, brand, mark or statement in writing or any representation or design or descriptive matter on or attached to or used in connection with or accompanying any plant or plant material." This covers

labels attached to plants, sleeves, bulb cards, seed packets, planting guides, plant lists catalogues, printed plant pots and electronic representation. The NPLG recommends that each plant label is:

- Written in the English language;
- Legible and prominent in distinct contrast to the background;
- Indelible – must not fade or be able to be rubbed off under normal conditions; and
- True and correct regarding information (i.e. not false or misleading).

It is not the aim of the NPLG to include everything that should be on every plant label produced. It is simply a vehicle to provide guidance on how to correctly deal with key issues including:

1. Correct botanical names – nomenclature
2. Intellectual property – Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) and Trademarks (TM)
3. Plant growth requirements and characteristics
4. Potentially harmful plants – health and environment

These four areas are discussed in detail within the NPLG and an overview is presented below:

1. Correct botanical names –

A botanical name is the actual scientific name for the plant. It is the only internationally unique identifier for the plant. Within the NPLG, a definition of species, hybrids, varieties and cultivars are clearly defined. The guidelines provide recommendations on how to correctly write botanical names on plant labels (e.g. botanical names are always written in italics with the first word, the genus, starting with a capital letter).

2. Intellectual Property –

Intellectual property represents the property of your mind or intellect and in business terms, this also means your proprietary knowledge. Within the NPLG, a definition of Plant Breeders Rights (PBR), Trademarks, Copyright and Plant Patents

are clearly defined. The guidelines provide recommendations on how to correctly denote intellectual property on plant labels.

3. Plant growth requirements and characteristics –

These provide guidance on the requirements for the plant to be successfully grown and should include: a brief description, desirable characteristics, preferred aspect, preferred soil type, likely height and width at maturity, special uses (e.g. bird attraction, suitable for coastal conditions) and any necessary cautions – potentially harmful or invasive, or disposal guidelines. These can be either illustrated or written so long as they are easy to understand.

4. Potentially harmful plants –

These plants may be harmful to human health and/or the environment. With

regards to humans, a potentially harmful plant is a plant that may cause poisoning, an adverse skin reaction or respiratory problems following exposure. An environmentally harmful plant is one that has been identified to have sufficient weed impacts, is undergoing a form of assessment for potential invasiveness or is known to thrive and spread aggressively (naturalise) outside its natural environment. The NPLG provide a list of plants that may be harmful to human health and indicates the required warning for inclusion on plant labels.

The NPLG also provides a series of examples relating to the above to avoid confusion in implementing the recommendations contained within.

Marketing opportunities

The NPLG are not meant to be onerous, nor are they intended to force growers and representatives of the nursery industry into altering their existing practices overnight.

They are, however, designed to present industry with an opportunity to enhance product presentation with credible information regarding plant performance, cultural notes, potentially harmful plants etc. by linking these areas with consistent and factual advice with well presented illustrations of the plant.

Plant labels are an important communication tool that growers can utilise to assist in marketing a plant and it is well reported that the vast majority of people will behave responsibly as consumers, given

sufficient product knowledge. A well constructed plant label abiding by the NPLG is a great opportunity to promote

your product and brand and distinguish you from operators who are not prepared to add value and manage their risks.



Seedlings labelled for sale, Benara Nurseries, WA.

Plant labels and biosecurity

Effective pest and disease control is critical to the Australian nursery and garden industry as it facilitates access to lucrative domestic as well as export markets. Biosecurity involves protecting the Australian economy, environment and the broader community from new pests and disease incursions and is a national Government priority implemented at pre-border, border and post-border locations. Biosecurity includes trying to prevent exotic pests and diseases from arriving in Australia, and helping to control outbreaks when they do occur.

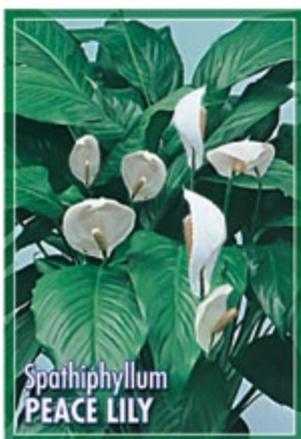
Biosecurity is everyone's business. For example, on August 1 2009 the South

Australia Plant Health Act 2009 (SA PHA09) became legally binding. This act spelt out the protocols for importing plant material into South Australia in order to protect the state from the introduction of pests and diseases of quarantine concern. For plants to gain access to South Australia, it is essential that a transport manifest outlining the name of the plants be forwarded and then assessed for approved entry. Without the correct plant names, the consignment may be rejected by the Regulatory Authority.

A further example is the regulatory requirement within New South Wales that specifies all citrus brought into and moved

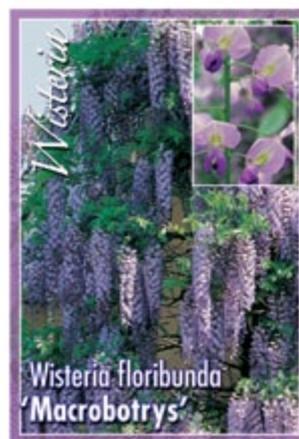
throughout the state of New South Wales be clearly and correctly labelled with botanical name and contact address of grower. The reasoning for this is to allow trace forward and trace back if there is a biosecurity breach without undue hardship for stakeholders.

It is important to note that emphasis on biosecurity will continue in the years ahead. Without correct plant labelling, the nursery and garden industry would be unable to support governments in managing biosecurity and may hamper a response to a specific pest or disease issue.



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Labels from Macbird Flora Print displaying potentially harmful plant (consumer health) warnings.

Good trade practices?

To make the assumption that everyone can recognise a tomato plant from a cactus and that people know you should not eat a poisonous plant is likely to be perceived as naïve. A grower must take all reasonable steps to avoid using labels for plants which are misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive. To mislead someone may include leading them to a wrong conclusion, creating a false impression or making false and inaccurate claims. It is important to provide the basics to assist the consumer to avoid product misuse or misadventure.

Effectively, the plant label is a document, the only document, which most consumers rely on, as they do for other consumer products. As such, there is a duty of care and responsibility for those involved in the production, supply and sale of plants to ensure the consumer knows what they are purchasing. Consumers believe they have a 'right to know', and this includes the right to accurate, unambiguous information at all times. However, whilst plant labelling is predominantly perceived to be the domain and responsibility of the grower, and to some extent the labelling manufacturer, it is also up to the consumer to act responsibly in following the information contained on the plant label. The duty of care is as much the responsibility of the consumer as it is the grower or label manufacturer.

The bottom line

As for any business, the nursery and garden industry should aspire to act in an honest, open and accountable fashion when dealing with industry stakeholders and the public at large. Industry should seek to carry out their business dealings in accordance with the Professional and Technical Standards acceptable in the industry and abide by Fair Trade Practices at all times. Correct plant labelling is an integral component of this process and it is important that industry adopts the recommendations within the NPLG with haste.

Further Information

Download a copy of the NGIA National Plant Labelling Guidelines at www.ngia.com.au

The following Nursery Papers:

- Plant Breeder's Rights – an Australian nursery and garden industry perspective
- Plant Patents – An alternative for the Nursery Industry
- Plant Intellectual Property
- Plant Health in Australia
- Grow Me Instead - How the nursery industry is addressing the spread of invasive plants



Labels from Norwood displaying potentially harmful plant (consumer health) warnings.



A label from Plant Pics displaying potentially harmful plant (consumer health) warnings.