

Commercial Horticulture December 2011 / January 2012

Auckland plantsman, Dale Harvey, says restrictions on plant imports are really holding back horticulture in New Zealand

Our industry could be a world leader — if only we'd let it

Reports by Trish Hosking

After living and working in 17 different countries over his career, garden educator Dale Harvey believes he has come to understand how blessed New Zealand is when you consider what we are able to grow here, and how well it grows.

"I remember, growing up, my grandparents telling me that a man could actually plant an arboretum here and sit under the shade in his lifetime, and it was the only place on earth that you could do that —that things grow seven times faster here than anywhere else.

"That's our claim to fame. Life coaches will all tell you to do what you do best. Find your passion and become great at that. And that's what I think New Zealand's gift is. We have this amazing botanical paradise."

However, Dale is frustrated by what he sees as the short-sightedness of the legislation surrounding the importation of new plant material into this country.

"The Government is just so entrenched in a Crown mentality that it's stopping any kind of future development in New Zealand. That's why everyone is leaving.

"It wasn't that long ago that the NZ dollar was worth as much as the US dollar and much more than the Australian dollar, and we earned the title of being God's own garden country. We were really dynamic, outgoing and progressive, a do-it-yourself country and we championed ourselves on that."

Dale feels we have let our fear of plant varieties becoming invasive get in the way of the opportunities that importing new material potentially offers.

"This is more than just having a few agapanthus going wild down the road. This is our future. This is our livelihood. We're holding back a huge horticultural industry from being a world leader. Just imagine if we were open to this.

We could be importing plants from Europe and North America and China, taking their best hybrids and creating new ones here in New Zealand."

And Dale notes that would be nothing new. “Duncan and Davies did exactly this for generations. Most of the world’s best trees and shrubs in the Northern Hemisphere were being imported from New Zealand and Duncan and Davies.”

Dale feels that advances in transportation in more recent times make exporting even more viable. “Now we could be doing the same thing with seedlings, with cloning.

All of that could be happening here in New Zealand and it could be marketed around the world. We would have a multi-million dollar industry instead of one that’s right now falling on its arse.”

Dale says the bulb market is a case in point. “We have probably the best tulip grower on earth, Philip Van Eeden, in Invercargill. He exports to Holland but commiserates with the rest of us in that he can’t bring any of the new hybrids into the country”

Dale says Philip Van Eeden has done remarkable work with the material he has and supplies the Dutch bulb market with some of the finest bulbs in the world, but he is deprived of the stunning new hybrids being developed in Europe and the US which, if he were able to import, he could incorporate into his own breeding programme here.

“It’s an attitude of fear that’s holding things back. We could employ every person in New Zealand in the horticultural industry.

Not necessarily all growing things, but with all the support networks we could be the world’s garden paradise, exporting all around the world. It’s just a matter of opening the door and allowing it to happen.”



Dale Harvey – our attitude of fear is holding us back