

# News & Views

## *for New Hampshire's Green Industry*

January - March 2008

### New Year's Resolution: Improve Signage

Happy 2008!

The New Year is often associated with personal and business resolutions that hold for a day or a month and then get sidetracked to become history, a history that repeats itself year after year.

Call it a New Year's resolution or a firm business commitment, but communicating with your customers and doing it well is a must for a retail business such as your garden center or greenhouse operation.

Communication can follow different strategies, take many forms and adapt to any budget, but, regardless of the size of your operation, you'll need to make signage part of your marketing plan. Your signs' messages should be clear, easy to read, concise, obvious, understandable, pleasant and attractive.

Consider creating signs in each of these major categories:

#### **Roadside business sign**

Each business should have a roadside sign with the business name. The sign asserts your identity, and it should inform the customers where they are. Knowing you by name will allow customers to refer their friends to your business. The business signage is part of your branding image and should fit with your image objectives and business message.

If your roadside sign is already erected, take time before the growing season starts to see if it needs a fresh coat of paint, if it is still holding well in the ground, or if there



Customers like to know about the characteristics of a plant. Short messages are very effective. Also note the Rolling Green Nursery logo on the corner of the sign.

are any branches of trees or shrubs obstructing it. During the growing season check the landscaped area around your roadside sign often to ensure that the area remains neatly landscaped and not overgrown with weeds. An attractive business sign in a tidy surrounding could make the difference between a passing car pulling in or simply driving past your business.

If you are a new business and thinking of erecting a roadside business sign, check first with the authorities such as your town or state (depending if your road is a town road or state road) as zoning ordinances or state regulations will dictate the size of the sign and many other details. By doing your homework well in advance, will save you money and hassle.

At any rate, customers should be able to see the business sign as they are driving. As you design it, think about the speed at which people can see it, the height and width of the letters, printing style, color combination, number of words and the message.

## Department/Product-Category Signs

As people shop for landscape plants and hard goods, department or category signs should direct them to what they are looking for and reassure them they are in the right spot. For departments, you might have categories such as Annuals, Native plants, Shrubs & Trees, Shade-loving Plants, Containers, Tools, and Fertilizers. Or you



Photo by Nada Haddad

This large directional sign helps customers locate major departments. Scenic Nursery.

might choose to group plants and products by themes: The Butterfly Garden, The Herb Garden, The Cottage Garden, etc.

Signs should be double-sided, with information that can be read from a 20-25 feet distance on either side. Keep product-category signs consistent in style and color.

## Product signs

Use a single sign to communicate essential information about each plant. If you have a logo, make sure to include it on every sign. The sign should:

- Provide the plant's common name (botanical names would be useful if you have more whole sale customers.)
- List important characteristics and benefits (e.g., Blooms all season long. Drought tolerant. Fruits attract wildlife. Branch structure and color provide winter interest.)
- Offer descriptive information:
  - o Its height and width at maturity,
  - o Its preferred environment (e.g., Sun, shade, or partial shade? Does it need well-drained soil, or will it tolerate wet feet?)
  - o Any special care requirements (e.g., Needs annual pruning.)
- The price of the plant.

Why bother making another sign when each plant may already have a plant label? Three reasons:

1. You save the customer the bother of grabbing the plant or squatting down to squint at the tiny print on the label.
2. Good signage helps answer basic customer questions, leaving more time for you and employees to do other chores.
3. Informing customers about your products' uses and benefits is an excellent customer service, and excellent service generates repeat business and free word-of-mouth advertising.

Product signs should be obvious and erected within the same group of plants. Whether your signs are hand-written in-house, or done by a professional, make them readable from 2-3 feet away and consistent in color and style.

Lower-case letters are easier for customers to read than all capital letters. For ease of reading, don't use fancy fonts or italics (except for botanical names).



Photo by Nada Haddad

The magic of seedlings and what customers can expect during the growing season. Lake Street Garden.

A picture of the plant in bloom or full-grown will help customers get familiar with the plant, especially in the case of new varieties, heirlooms or unusual plants. Photos make it easier for customers to visualize plants growing in their own landscapes.

And don't forget to check signs on regular basis during the season, and replace any that are faded, torn, or dated.

### Promotional signs

Promotional signs, as the name indicates, aim at promoting an event such as “Lilac Appreciation Day” to promote a specific product and identifying a special time “April 15”.

### Information signage

These types of signs identify your services and policies and should be written in positive language. An example of a positive sign would be “Please handle plants with care,” rather than the negative message: “DO NOT TOUCH.”



Photo by Nada Haddad

Customers encouraged in smelling different herbs could result in more plant sales. Rolling Green Nursery.

No matter what type of sign it is, the sign’s message should motivate your customers to take action by purchasing plants and other products you offer. Make improved signage a firm business resolution for 2008.

## Census Delivers Opportunity to Shape the Future of Agriculture

It’s not every day that a walk to your mailbox leads to an opportunity to shape the future of the agricultural industry. But for farmers across New England, that opportunity soon will become a reality. The 2007 Census of Agriculture, the only source of consistent and comprehensive agricultural data for every state and county in the nation, is currently being mailed to farmers across the United States.

Conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Census provides detailed data covering nearly every facet of U.S. agriculture. Government organizations, lawmakers, town planners and individual farm operations can use this vital information to help them plan for future facilities, services and community growth.

“The 2007 Census of Agriculture provides farmers with

a powerful voice. The information gathered through the Census influences policy decisions that can have a tremendous impact on farmers and their communities,” said Gary Keough director of the NASS New England Field Office. “I strongly encourage all farmers in New England to promptly complete and return the Census, so they can voice to the nation the value and importance of agriculture.”

Keough added that in addition to affecting policy decisions, Census information also influences community growth. Many companies review Census data when determining where to establish their businesses, which further emphasizes the importance of supplying accurate information.

“The 2007 Census of Agriculture is an opportunity to shape the future of the agricultural industry and rural communities for years to come,” said Keough. “Every producer, no matter how big or small the operation, should take advantage of that opportunity.”

Completed forms are due by February 4, 2008. Producers can return their forms by mail or, for the first time, they have the convenient option of filling out the Census online. For more information about the Census, visit [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov) or call toll-free (888) 4AG-STAT or (888) 424-7828. The Census is your voice, your future, and your responsibility.

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## Bring your questions to New England Grows!

The Great Ideas Pavilion is back by popular demand. Designed and staffed by the region’s top extension personnel, you’ll find an interactive opportunity to meet one-on-one with university faculty about the newest and most important research-based information that will impact you and your customers.

The Great Ideas! pavilion is located in the middle of the Common on the exposition floor. Stop by any time during regular exhibit hours and tap this wealth of information



## Upcoming 2008 Events

Check the Cooperative Extension Agricultural Resources calendar for updated information on programs offered by Cooperative Extension. <http://extension.unh.edu/Agric/Agric.htm>. Then click on the calendar link on the left.

February 6 - 8. **New England Grows!** Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. [www.NEGrows.org](http://www.NEGrows.org)

February 8 - 9. **NH Farm & Forest Expo.** Center of NH-Radisson Hotel, Manchester, NH. [www.nhfarmandforestexpo.org](http://www.nhfarmandforestexpo.org)

February 12. **Greenhouse Bedding Plant Production.** Massabesic Audubon Center, Auburn, NH 641-6060 or 679-5616 [www.extension.unh.edu](http://www.extension.unh.edu)

March 5. **Landscape Kick-Off.** PSNH Auditorium Manchester, NH. For more info call 862-3200 or see UNHCE Ag. Calendar.

March 6-8. **Ecological Landscape Association Conference and Eco-Marketplace.** Springfield, MA. "Revisoning the Landscape: An Ecological Approach". [www.ecolandscaping.org](http://www.ecolandscaping.org)

March 12. **Turfgrass Maintenance for Landscapers and Municipalities.** Albany, NH. For more info call Sadie Puglisi at 225-5505 or see UNHCE Ag. Calendar.

March 13. **Perennial Plant Conference.** Lewis B. Rome Commons on the University of Connecticut Storrs campus. For more information visit: [www.hort.uconn.edu/2008ppc](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/2008ppc)

March 16. **NH Landscape Association Spring Meeting,** Massabesic Audubon Center, Auburn. 1-800-639-5601 [nhlaonline.org](http://nhlaonline.org)

March 26. **Garden Center Kick-Off.** Intervale Pancake House and Stone Falls Garden, Henniker, NH. For more info call Sadie Puglisi at 225-5505 or see UNHCE Ag. Calendar.

March 28-30. **12th Annual Seacoast Home & Garden Show.** Whittemore Center, UNH, Durham. [www.homegardenflowershow.com](http://www.homegardenflowershow.com)

April 3. **Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs.** UNH Durham. For more info call 862-3200 or see UNHCE Ag. Calendar.

March 28-29. **UNH Greenhouse Open House,** UNH Durham. For more info call at 862-3200.

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### Integrated Landscaping: Following Nature's Lead Now Available

*Integrated Landscaping: Following Nature's Lead* is a new publication for New Hampshire landowners, landscapers, municipalities and others that want to use natural ecosystems as models, taking a nonlinear, holistic approach that addresses these processes simultaneously.

Cost is \$19.95, plus shipping and handling, for a total of \$24. Go to the UNH Cooperative Extension Web site at [extension.unh.edu](http://extension.unh.edu) and click on "Publications" on the front page to order your copy.



This newsletter is a cooperative effort of the Ornamentals Extension Educators and Specialist at the University of New Hampshire. It is published quarterly. Its purpose is to inform and update industry members on issues and research to the production, use and maintenance of ornamentals and turf in New Hampshire.

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