



## Native Plant Policy Focuses on Ecology, Seneca History

By Pat Galeza



In the spring of 2014, the Seneca Nation of Indians unanimously approved a Native Plant Policy ensuring that new landscape planting in public spaces on Seneca lands will be exclusively comprised of local indigenous species. It has long been recognized that continued planting of non-native species poses a significant threat to ecosystems and causes harm to the environment. The current Seneca Nation Council is committed to restoring, preserving, and maintaining local indigenous plants that are significant to the culture of the Seneca people and

that help to maintain the balance of nature. Although the new policy applies exclusively to plants in public spaces, owners of private property at the Seneca Nation are encouraged to reintroduce Native species and to remove invasive and introduced Eurasian plants. To guide planting decisions at the Seneca Nation, a Recommended No Planting List, along with lists of Native Plants of Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua Counties, has been formulated.

No other U.S. Native Tribe has established and formally enacted an indigenous plant policy. In doing so, the Seneca Nation has demonstrated its commitment to continuing and expanding efforts to reintroduce native species to Seneca territories. The Seneca Nation and its planting policy can serve as a model for other Native Nations as they work to reintroduce the species that have, for so long, played a secondary role in the life and health of many indigenous peoples. With this planting policy, the Seneca Nation has taken a substantial step forward in preserving its culture and protecting and maintaining the Seneca Community's ecological footprint.

This policy has been applauded by Dr. Jeremy Pinto, Research Plant Physiologist and Tribal Nursery Specialist with the Forest Service of the US Department of Agriculture, who has stated: "While it should be well-ingrained in us to preserve and promote the plants that are significant to our respective cultures, a policy like this brings the issues of cultural preservation, invasive species, sustainability, and adaptability to the forefront of everyday management practices in a good way." Media sources that have featured information on the Native Plant Policy include ABC News, Fox Business News, *The San Diego Union Tribune*, the Native Nations Institute at the University of Arizona, and the Indian Country Today Media Network. Dissemination of information about the Native Plant Policy will provide other Native Nations, as well as non-Native communities, with information and motivation to establish their own indigenous planting policy.

The new planting policy puts an official stamp on the Seneca Nation's ongoing efforts to reintroduce native species to Seneca territories. To implement the Native Plant Policy, the Seneca Nation has established the position of Groundskeeper. Two Groundskeepers will be responsible for all planting and maintenance duties at the Allegany and Cattaraugus Territories. Each will coordinate a program to beautify the entrances to all public buildings at the territories.

Three recent planting projects have put the new policy into action. The area surrounding the William Seneca Administration Building at the Cattaraugus Territory has been redesigned to reflect the history of the Seneca Nation. It has become a living narrative of Seneca culture, a demonstration of the intimate connection to the land that has been a source of identity and pride for Seneca people since time immemorial. All Eurasian species have been removed, 446 native trees and shrubs have been planted, and a minimum of 25 different native species have been re-introduced to the landscape.

The species that have been included are those that historically supplied the Seneca people with food, medicine, fiber, dyes, tools, and plants used for ceremonies. At the Cattaraugus Territory’s Community Center, Norway Maples are being removed and replaced with Native Sugar Maples, 15 raised beds have been introduced and canning and youth gardens have been established.



Perhaps the most visible evidence of the Native Plant Policy for the general public has been the plantings within the traffic circle at the intersection of Routes 5 and 20. The newly constructed circle, which directs the flow of traffic for these two heavily traveled roads, now boasts native trees and grasses, including Switch Grass, and wildflowers such as Black-Eyed Susan. Similar plantings can also be seen at the nearby corners. The project was a partnership of the Seneca Nation and the New York State Department of Transportation.

The Native Plant Policy has focused attention – and action – on issues of ecology and Seneca history. It will serve as a guide for Seneca Nation planting choices, as well as a touchstone for other Native Nations wishing to incorporate culturally-informed decisions into their own planting policies.



Serviceberry, Fragrant Sumac & Flowering Raspberry



Grassy Flagpole Island converted into native woody landscape bed.



## SENECA NATION OF INDIANS

### POLICY ON USAGE OF INDIGENOUS PLANT SPECIES IN LANDSCAPING

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The Seneca Nation of Indians (SNI) recognizes that continued planting of non-Native species at Seneca Nation Territories poses a significant threat to the ecosystems of SNI Territories, causing harm to the environment as well as to the health of those who reside on or visit Seneca lands.

The Seneca Nation of Indians is committed to restoring, preserving, and maintaining local indigenous species in its Territories in order to protect the environment and remain true to the legacy of the ancestors and the gifts of Mother Earth; and following a presentation by the Food Is Our Medicine program and Planning Department staff, the Council has determined that it is in the best interest of the Nation and its members to adopt a Policy to ensure that new plantings in public spaces on Nation lands will be exclusively local indigenous species, and to encourage private Seneca land holders to choose indigenous species in their planting decisions.

#### Principles

- I. All future development(s) of public spaces on Seneca Nation territory, including lands made available to corporations directly or indirectly owned by the Nation, will incorporate landscaping designs limited to Native indigenous plants of the Seneca people and the Western New York State region.
- II. Native plant species will be indigenous to WNY to include the following Counties:
  1. Allegany
  2. Cattaraugus
  3. Chautauqua
  4. Erie
  5. Genesee
  6. Niagara
  7. Orleans
  8. Wyoming
- III. Native species are those plants locally indigenous to the Western New York region to include the above mentioned eight (8) counties prior to European settlement.
- IV. Many indigenous plant species are significant to the culture of the Seneca people and their revitalization on Seneca lands is an important aspect of the preservation of Seneca culture.

Use of indigenous plants includes and is not limited to:

- (1) **Edible Plants**
  - (a) Crops, roots, nuts, seeds, fruit, leaves
  - (b) Beverages
  - (c) Seasonings
  - (d) Candy
- (2) Plants used for **Medicines**
  - (a) See attached list: *Indigenous Medicine Plants of the Iroquois*
- (3) Plants used to produce **Fiber and Dyes**
  - (a) Cordage
  - (b) Basketry
  - (c) Bedding, mats, rugs
  - (d) clothing
- (4) Plants used in **Ceremonies**
- (5) **Other**
  - (a) Hunting and fishing: bows, arrows, traps, lures, lines, rods, arrows, spears
  - (b) Tools, utensils, cordage, basketry, containers, toys
  - (c) Fuel
  - (d) Fragrance
  - (e) Musical instruments

V. It is imperative to maintain and periodically update an “Advisory Invasive Plant List,” also known as a “*No-Planting List*,” of banned non-Native, Eurasian, commercial varieties and cultivated landscape plants, invasive or potentially invasive species. Plants on the “*No-Planting List*” may not be incorporated in the landscaping of any public spaces and in or around any Seneca Nation public building located on Seneca Territories. Nation programs, including housing related programs, shall discourage individuals from incorporating such species in their landscaping programs.

VI. This Policy does not mandate the removal of any existing landscaping plans incorporating “*No-Planting*” listed species. The Seneca Nation, however, highly encourages the prompt removal of any of the following “highly invasive” or “very highly invasive” species (indicated by \*) from Nation lands. An abbreviated no-planting list follows:

<i>Botanical Name</i>	<b>Common Name</b>
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway Maple*
<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>	Sycamore Maple*
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	Japanese Barberry*
<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>	Oriental Bittersweet*

<i>Elaeagnus umbellata</i>	Autumn Olive*
<i>Euonymus alatus</i>	Burning Bush/Winged Euonymus*
<i>Lonicera japonica</i>	Japanese Honeysuckle*
<i>Lonicera maackii</i>	Amur Honeysuckle*
<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	Reed Canary-grass*
<i>Picea abies</i>	Norway Spruce
<i>Picea pungens</i>	Colorado Spruce
<i>Pinus nigra</i>	Austrian Pine
<i>Prunus serrulata</i>	Kwanzan Cherry
<i>Prunus subhirtella</i>	Flowering Cherry
<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	Douglas Fir
<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	Black Locust*
<i>Rosa multiflora</i>	Multiflora Rose*
<i>Spiraea japonica</i>	Japanese Spirea
<i>Vinca minor</i>	Common Periwinkle

- VII. This Policy also establishes an approved list of regional Native species and Native plants significant to the Haudenosaunee culture that shall be permitted to be purchased, propagated, planted, landscaped, or introduced on any and all Seneca Territories. The “Advisory Invasive Plant List,” also known as the “*No-Planting List*,” and the “*Encouraged Plant List*” are to be considered works in progress.