

Toward Sustainable Perennial Production

Our “green” credentials

With so much buzz about sustainability and reducing carbon footprints, I feel compelled to give you, our customers, an insight into how we produce our plants. We are proud of our practices and give much thought to how they effect the environment, the community and ourselves.

Farmland stewardship

Since our beginnings in 1997, we have strived to adopt gentle nursery practices. Most container nurseries in our region were built by first stripping away the topsoil and growing on the sandy subsoil below it. The theory behind this industry norm is the sand provides a better surface on which to grow due to improved drainage. Unfortunately this practice destroys a farm’s ability to grow in the ground crops forever. Also, the exposed sand is more vulnerable to erosion and low in microbial activity.

Our nursery is built right on top of the topsoil. We feel that as stewards of our farmland we have a responsibility to retain the soil so that future generations of farmers will still be able to use our land after we are gone from it (hard to fathom right now!).

Since relocating our nursery in 2005 to our current 23 acre farm, we have embarked on an ambitious plan to manage our farm’s ecology. What was a monocrop hay field is slowly being transformed through plantings of a diversity of natives. The ultimate goal of this effort is to attract predators such as beneficial insects and birds to thwart pest outbreaks, using nature to control pests instead of pesticides. Having the largest selection of native perennial plant species in the New York area, it is also an excellent showcase of our plant offerings! The science on this is still limited so we are venturing into new territory but hope to be a model for managed farm ecosystems some day.

Low water use

We employ several methods in our irrigation practices aimed at reduced water use. In 2006, we installed a large drip irrigation area. Not only has this reduced our water usage but it also has the added benefit of reducing foliar disease pressure by keeping foliage dry. We also have nursery sections that are hand water only areas. Hand watering, although labor intensive, achieves the best results for some crops and for some stages in the production cycle. For the rest of the nursery, we use a combination of low flow heads and hand watering depending on the situation. We feel managing irrigation is one of the most critical functions in the nursery. Managed well, it can significantly reduce losses, the need for fungicides and water consumption.

Biofiltration of runoff

We manage runoff with the use of swales. Swales are planted with our native wetland plants which slow down the runoff reducing erosion and act as biofilters absorbing excess nutrients that may leach from nursery containers. They also make a great demonstration of our wetland plants in action!

No herbicides

The thought of putting pre-emergent herbicides on top of our containers is abhorrent to us. This puts employees (and you) at risk of exposure to herbicides every time a pot is handled. Glover Perennials uses no herbicides in our production practices. Our nursery containers are hand weeded. Our perimeter areas are mowed instead of sprayed with herbicides. Like the swales, the mowed areas act as biofilters and help to reduce erosion.

Fertilizers/Pesticides

Our plants are fertilized with a premium quality (expensive) slow release fertilizer incorporated into the soil. This practice has been shown through university research to reduce nutrient leaching out of the pot compared to liquid fertilizers. Plus no supplemental fertilizing is needed once you receive our plants.

We are heavily reliant on managing pests through optimizing cultural practices and continually seeking reduced risk pesticides to incorporate into our Integrated Pest Management program. When we apply pesticides it is targeted based on scouting reports and not blanket applied. Also we routinely apply beneficial microbes to our crops for disease control.

Recycling

In addition to having always been religious recyclers of all the traditionally recyclable materials, we have begun to recycle all our nursery pots/trays and greenhouse plastic. Plastics make up the bulk of nursery waste and to remove these from the waste stream is a major achievement. We would be glad to accept your empty Glover Perennials pots/trays if you cannot recycle them yourselves. Please call ahead to arrange for a special pickup.

A common thread in all these practices is our determined, hands on approach that we think sets us apart. Although more time consuming and bears additional costs to us, the results are more well established, fuller plants that have a better chance of survival.