

70 Years and Still Growing! Country Gardens Nursery Celebrates and Goes Native.

Eastport, NY (August 31, 2017) – Country Gardens Nursery, a wholesale nursery grower and distributor based in eastern Suffolk County celebrates its 70th year in the nursery and landscape business.

It's a cool morning by late August standards and company president Matt Gettinger is checking the soil moisture on a newly planted crop of Pennsylvania sedge. "These plants will be ready for sale by late Spring, maybe a little earlier. This is one of the few items that we grow entirely from division, the vast majority of the other sedges and grasses we have here are grown from seed."

The newly transplanted sedge is one of the crops the nursery grows under its *Long Island Natives* label. The *Long Island Natives* division of Country Gardens Nursery has been tasked by Gettinger to be the "go-to" source for native plants on Long Island. The nursery grows a seemingly diverse selection of native species widely used across Long Island and the greater Mid Atlantic / New England regions for ecological restoration efforts. The company boasts a plethora of coastal species, such as grasses, sedges, and other maritime shrubs that are commonly used in wetland applications.

The natives division of the operation now accounts for more than half of the company's bottom line each season. Expanding the native plant portfolio has been a key focus for the business since around the time Matt Gettinger joined his father Brad in business back in 2008.

An expanded native plant offering is no stretch of a statement. Long Island Natives currently grows over 150 different species of native flora in a variety of different sized options. The company has made significant investments into semi-automated equipment and bottom heated some of its houses for the production of smaller sized materials grown in flats, a staple size for the industry that Long Island Natives serves.

"Cost controls and your ability to sell at key price points are critical in any business and ours is certainly no different", says Gettinger. "We were fortunate to land a decent contract with the City Parks Department to contract grow native seedlings a few years back and we've been working hard to build our native offering from there."

The contract grow program Gettinger is referring to is part of New York City's Million Trees Campaign (milliontreesnyc.org). The initiative is a citywide, public & private program challenged to plant and care for one million new trees across NYC's five boroughs over the course of a decade. Under the initiative Country Gardens Nursery has grown over 140,000 native trees that have been used to help restore various parks and natural areas within New York City's Parks.

"It was a great project to be involved with and looking back it came at a perfect time for our operation. We had just converted several acres from field production to cold frame space and we were looking into various container crops and native plants kept popping up on our radar."

Working on large scale municipal projects is nothing new for Country Gardens Nursery. The company started by Matt's grandfather in 1947 has a rich history of working with state, county, and city agencies. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the company had been involved as a landscape contractor working on the continued expansion of several of New York State's parkways. The company was also awarded the majority of landscape work completed during the 1964 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows Park in Queens.

"The trend towards native plants is something that Country Gardens identified early on as an opportunity worth pursuing and that we thought would be a good fit for the operation given our scale and resources", says Gettinger.

The natives division focuses largely on municipal contracts to operate efficiently, but the demand from residential projects is also starting to trickle in. According to Gettinger, the consumer trend in the popularity of native plants is on the rise, but it's still a niche market. Still, plenty of companies are starting to take notice and programs such as the Sustainable Site Initiative are helping to drive demand through professional certifications and education.

"I remember when we first started growing many of these native plants and a lot of the big nursery guys would look at us like we were out of our minds. Now a lot of them have become our customers."

In addition to its native plants brand, Country Gardens Nursery continues to serve landscape professionals out of its 1 and only location in Eastport, NY. The wholesale nursery distributor offers a wide selection of above ground materials and also grows ornamental stock on the 50 acre site. The nursery produces both field and container grown materials. The company is currently managed by father and son, Brad and Matt Gettinger. Brad Gettinger is a past NYSNLA & LINLA President. Country Gardens, started in 1947 by S. Robert Gettinger, celebrates its 70th year in business during 2017.

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