

Landscape architecture survey: Is plant knowledge passe?

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Authors of a recent study examined an ongoing debate in the discipline of landscape architecture: exactly how much plant knowledge is required for professionals in the field? Robert Brzuszek, Richard Harkess, and Eric Stortz evaluated the attitudes and perceptions of practicing landscape architects in the southeastern United States with regards to the importance of horticultural knowledge. The survey results were published in *HortTechnology*.

"Many recent discussions within the landscape community have focused on the decline of plant materials knowledge within the profession", explained Brzuszek, the report's corresponding author. "Historically, plant knowledge and the ability to select and incorporate plants into the design process has been a cornerstone in the practice of [landscape architecture](#). However, a 2009 study reported that only two courses in planting design were required by the vast majority of accredited landscape architecture programs."

"Landscape firms that provide planting and management plans as part of their site-based services need employees with sufficient plant knowledge, or at least need someone in their office who has a [specialization](#) in plants", noted Brzuszek. "Our study was designed to survey and evaluate the perceptions of practicing landscape architects in the southeastern United States to better understand the importance of plant knowledge within the profession of this region".

The researchers mailed a 20-question survey to 120 landscape architects.

The survey questions were designed to reflect the [diversity](#) of job types within the profession of landscape architecture—ranging from urban and regional planning to transportation planning to historic preservation—and included questions related to plant education and experience. The majority of the 63 respondents were seasoned landscape architects specializing in residential and commercial markets; responses came from professionals working in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida.

Nearly half of the participants (48%) said that they believed they had an average amount of plant materials knowledge. "Some firms or designers, including those surveyed, specialize only in urban or regional planning, GIS and land studies, industrial development, marketing, and recreation facilities, which preclude much plant knowledge", Brzuszek said. "However, the majority of our respondents were in the residential market, which may exhibit better plant knowledge than other planning professionals."

Although a majority of survey respondents had a "favorable opinion" of their own plant knowledge, they did not necessarily feel the same way about their peers. When asked if newly graduated landscape architecture students had a sufficient amount of plant materials knowledge, 71% of respondents indicated they did not. A remarkable 73% of respondents said they agreed that the profession of landscape architecture as a whole has distanced itself from plant materials when compared to previous years.

"The results from our study showed that respondents strongly felt that plant knowledge is an important part of their professional skills, and that recent graduates of landscape architecture and the members of the profession as a whole both appear to be more distanced from having strong plant expertise", Brzuszek remarked. "Although a broad realm of resources and continuing educational courses are available, the

professionals we surveyed felt that experience is still the best teacher for new graduates in the field".

More information: The complete study and abstract are available on the ASHS *HortTechnology* electronic journal web site:
[horttech.ashspublications.org/ ... nt/abstract/21/1/126](http://horttech.ashspublications.org/...nt/abstract/21/1/126)

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