

## Round table Plant ethic

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The questions to reflect upon were « What is Weed ? » and « Should you give a pot plant as gift ? »

The first instinctive reaction was that they find it worse and less ethical to give cut flowers as gift as they have been killed and are thus “dead” ... but did not think about it actually that by giving a pot plant to someone who neglect it, it may also decay and possibly die.

All agreed that the term “weed” is a human invention and from our perspective and not that of the plant. They gave as definition unfortunately at the wrong place at the wrong moment. A same plant can be a weed in some circumstances and in others not.

One participant has stayed with Native Americans and said that in former time or tribes who still lives from what they find in the wild, everything is seen as alive, nature is eating and being eaten, but no real difference is made if an animal or plant dies off naturally or by the hand of mankind.

However as soon as we decide to breed plants or animals, to change them for our usage, it should come with a responsibility (everything deserves a good life, even when it is eaten afterwards).

While they did not know or think of terms like plant blindness or plant ethics, the people present said they already think twice before deciding to remove a plant from their Garden.

They also found that you can go further in keeping “weeds” and diversity in private gardens as usually it is not your source of income, but they understand that in agriculture, where they live from it, they have to remove some weed and apply processes of yield efficiency.

The topic of eradicating invasive plant species was shortly addressed: the participants had the feeling that eradicating invasive species sometimes seems discriminating and highly dependent upon the time frame.

We asked additionally some questions about if you have to remove a plant or an animal from a protected area how do you choose ? Would there be such an emotional reactions from the public if it was not deer or pigs/hogs that had to be killed, but plants with the recent African swine pest.

We talked about the ecosystem functioning and impact to decide how to manage it.

The participants had than questions on how we do it in the Botanic Garden, as we have also to remove plants and maintain it, remove trees. We explained that since spraying is not allowed anymore alternatives are tested, implemented, but it has a big cost in manpower, efficiency and it is also very energy consuming, which has then other impacts.

We also discussed about the paths that need to remain accessible for lesser valid people. For example having gravels paths is nice, but sometimes we reflect if not have a good path that is totally asphalt for them and the rest let be more wild and natural.

We also addressed the issues with the geese, the damage they occasion and impact. But the emotional reactions of the public on removal actions.

In terms of plant ethics, they found that people can be more emotionally attached to trees, especially heritage trees as they are big, there for long before us and after us in principle, can be individually identified (almost with a personality) while for other smaller plants it is more difficult to be connected as it could be with animals.

### ***Specifieke vragen van Jan Braeckman:***

- **Hoe wordt deze thematiek ontvangen bij dit publiek?**

De deelnemers ervoeren het als boeiend en interessant om uitgedaagd te worden door stellingen als 'vegetarisme kwam voort uit dierenethiek, wat betekent dit voor plantenethiek?' of 'bonsai: heeft de mens het recht om planten te manipuleren als hobby of kunst?'

- **Hoe wordt dit besproken?**

Het was een open discussie waarbij iedereen zijn gedachten naar voor bracht, zonder grote struikelblokken of onenigheden. Iedereen leek redelijk eensgezind.

- **Welke boodschappen en argumenten blijken overtuigend?**

Een plant is een levend wezen en verdient daarom respect. Dit wil niet zeggen dat je niets meer mag doden en/of opeten, maar wel dat je steeds afwegingen moet maken en bewust zijn van impact van beslissingen.

- **Werkt het om mensen te doen nadenken, een stukje ethische gevoeligheid te laten ontwikkelen?**

De deelnemers waren zeker geen 'gemiddelde doorsnede van de bevolking', iedereen was natuurliefhebber is een of andere zin en nagenoeg iedereen had blijkbaar al een degelijk ethisch besef, ook wat betreft planten. Slechts 1 deelnemer zei niet bewust met planten om te gaan als levende wezens.

*Vraag: nodigen we de deelnemers van deze workshop uit om verder deel te nemen aan onze werkgroep plantenethiek? Deze vraag kan misschien ook gelanceerd worden onder het personeel van de Plantentuin?*