

When Sending A Gift From Your Garden, Beware: Don't Pack A Pest

(NAPS)—While gardeners enjoy their harvests, many want to share their bounty with friends and family who live far away. But that could be a problem. Invasive pests can hitchhike on home-grown plants, fruits and other agricultural products when you mail or ship them. In fact, a care package sent to family and friends—sent with the best of intentions—could have a devastating effect on U.S. agriculture, natural resources and the economy, if it arrives harboring an invasive pest or disease.

This year is an excellent time to pay attention to this risk. The United Nations has designated 2020 as the International Year of Plant Health to recognize the essential role that plants play. This initiative is a global campaign calling upon nations and individuals to combine efforts and raise awareness about the importance of protecting plants from Hungry Pests. Each person can play a crucial role in preventing the spread of invasive species, both in the U.S. and around the world. You can make a difference—starting in your own backyard and garden.

The first step is to familiarize yourself with the pests found in this area and take care not to spread them to new places. It's equally important to avoid bringing invasive pests into this country from overseas. The United States Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has an important message for anyone who is purchasing plants, seeds or plant products online from foreign sellers, or who might receive a package from someone outside the United States. That is, food sent from a friend or family member living overseas, or seeds and other planting material purchased through the Internet, could pose a risk to U.S. plant health. Fortunately, you can follow four easy guidelines for safely buying, mailing, shipping or receiving plants, seeds and other plant products:

1. Food items. Homegrown fruits and vegetables can host a number of invasive pests, which may not be visible to the naked eye. Before you mail items from your garden or accept an international package that includes food items, call the State Plant Health Director to find out what's allowed. If an area has been quarantined for a specific pest,



If sending or receiving agricultural products, make sure they're not harboring invasive pests.

take care to observe the restrictions of the quarantine to avoid spreading the pest to new places.

2. Plants and seeds. When buying plants and seeds online or through a mail-order catalog, purchase them from a reputable source that complies with federal and state requirements to ensure they are free of invasive pests. Before buying plants or seeds online from other countries, contact the State Plant Health Director to find out if the items need to be inspected and certified as pest-free or meet other conditions to legally bring them into the United States. If you ever receive seeds in the mail that you didn't purchase, don't plant them. Instead report them to the State Plant Health Director.

3. Soil. Mailing or hand carrying soil into the United States is prohibited without the appropriate permit, and moving soil within the country is restricted unless authorized by USDA.

4. Handicrafts. Handcrafted souvenirs from other countries that are made from natural materials such as untreated wood or palm fronds can harbor pests and may be prohibited from import to the U.S. If hand carrying souvenirs into the country, be sure to declare them to U.S. Customs and Border Protection when you arrive in the United States, so they can inspect them and make sure they are free of pests. When sending these items through international mail, first contact the State Plant Health Director to find out if they are allowed or whether they must meet certain conditions to legally enter the country.

To learn more, visit HungryPests.com or join the conversation and get the latest updates on social media by following #PlantHealth and #IYPH2020.