What You Need To Know
Before Buying Plants Or Seeds From Overseas

(NAPS)—Online shopping and e-commerce have opened new doors for gardening enthusiasts, offering unprecedented access to rare and exotic plants and seed products from around the world at the click of a button. But before you buy plants or seeds online from overseas sellers, you should know they could pose a significant risk to U.S. agriculture and natural resources, because they can carry harmful plant pests and diseases.

It's The Law

It's illegal to import plants and seeds from overseas into the U.S. without the appropriate paperwork indicating they're pest-free. Just because it's easy to buy them online, does not mean they're safe and you, the buyer, are responsible for checking the origin and import requirements.

The Problem

Invasive pests and plant diseases are often not visible to the buyer and, if left unchecked, can easily and rapidly spread. Plant diseases, for example, can be carried in common garden staples grown outside the U.S., such as tomato and pepper seeds. Not only do invasive pests cost the U.S. an estimated $40 billion a year in damage to trees, plants, crops and related eradication and control efforts, they can have a significant effect on America's food supply.

An Answer

Fortunately, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has put together clear guidance on the steps online buyers should take to protect U.S. gardens, landscapes, agriculture and forests from this threat.

Six Steps To Safe Seeds And Plants

Here's what you need to do when buying plants or seeds online from another country:

1. Check whether you need an import permit for the plants or seeds you wish to bring in. If required, apply for and get an import permit from APHIS, which specifies the import requirements before the plant or seed

Enjoy planting your garden—just be sure you know the plants come from some place safe.

species is allowed entry into the country.

2. Request shipping labels from APHIS, if required under the permit conditions.

3. Inform the seller about the labeling and shipping requirements detailed in the permit.

4. Instruct the seller to include an invoice detailing the scientific name and quantity of plants or seeds in the shipment.

5. Ensure the seller has a phytosanitary certificate from the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) of the country of origin. This means the NPPO has inspected the plants or seeds and found them free of plant pests and diseases.

6. Instruct the seller to use labels provided by the buyer to ensure plants or seeds are delivered to an APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine Plant Inspection Station.

Everyone plays an important role in protecting U.S. food, gardens and trees. If you're planning to buy plants or seeds online from foreign sellers, take the appropriate steps to make sure you are following U.S. import laws.

Learn More

For questions about importing and exporting requirements, call APHIS at (877) 770-5990 or e-mail plantproducts.permits@usda.gov. To discover how to stop the spread of invasive plant pests and diseases, visit www.HungryPests.com.