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How To Buy Plants and Seeds Online

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Are you buying plants or seeds through an e-commerce site? If so, you are considered an **importer** and most likely need a permit.

Imported seeds and plants must meet U.S. import requirements to protect our country's agriculture and natural resources. Non-compliant items may contain harmful plant pests or diseases.

This page explains what's required if you plan to order or import plants or seeds into the United States from another country.

Seeds bought online from sellers outside the United States may not meet U.S. import requirements. Find out what you need to know about non-compliant seeds.

Import Permit Basics

An import permit issued by APHIS specifies which plant and seed species can enter the United States and under what conditions. These conditions can include treatment, packaging, and shipping requirements, among other things.

- **Most plants and seeds for planting require a PPQ 587 permit.**
- Some items are not allowed in the United States or have special requirements. For details, see Plants With Special Requirements and Prohibited Plants and Seeds With Special Requirements and Prohibited Seeds.
- There are also plants and seeds that do **not** require an import permit. View list of these items.

As the buyer/importer, **you** are responsible for making sure your online purchases meet U.S. import requirements.

Buyer Responsibilities

Before purchasing seeds or plants for planting from another country online, you must complete the following steps:

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1. Apply for and obtain a PPQ 587 import permit or permit exemption.

How To Apply

- Visit APHIS eFile to apply for a PPQ 587 import permit or confirm whether your item is exempt.
- Use our eFile Guide for step-by-step instructions. Only U.S. residents may apply for an import permit.

After You Apply

- **If a permit is required:** Send a copy of the permit to your exporter/seller so they can include it in your package.
- **If your item is exempt:** You will receive confirmation that no permit is needed. Send this confirmation to your exporter/seller to include in your package. Keep a copy for your records.

Buyers are responsible for ensuring sellers follow all shipping and labeling requirements listed in the permit.

2. Request shipping labels (if required).

The instructions on your import permit will tell you whether you need a shipping label. Not all permits require one—only plant products imported by mail (USPS or courier services like DHL, FedEx, or UPS) need green-and-yellow APHIS shipping labels. These labels show the address of the correct APHIS Plant Inspection Station and include a unique barcode.

When a Shipping Label *Is* Required

If your permit conditions state that a shipping label is needed, you (the buyer) must:

1. **Obtain the green-and-yellow shipping label (PPQ Form 508).**
    - Log into APHIS eFile.
    - Go to "My Activity" and search for your permit.
    - In the "Plant Inspection Station Labels" section of the permit details page, view and download your labels.
    - Need help? Email greenandyellowplantslabelrequest@usda.gov.
2. **Email the label to the seller.**

    - The seller must print it in color and attach it to the outside of the package per the instructions provided with the label.
3. **Instruct the seller to include your name, address, telephone number, and permit number in each shipment.**
4. **Let the seller know which approved U.S. ports of entry are listed on the permit.**

3. Instruct the exporter/seller to include a detailed invoice and other required information with the shipment.

Plants and seeds shipped by mail to the United States **must** include:

- An **invoice or packing list** that clearly states the **scientific name(s)** and **quantity** of plants and/or seeds.
- Correct and plain address on package to an APHIS Plant Inspection Station at one of the approved ports of entry listed on the import permit.
- A separate sheet of paper within the package, plainly and correctly bearing the name, address, and telephone number of the intended recipient (buyer).
- Plain and correct description on the outer container with the following information—
    - General nature and quantity of the contents;
    - Country and locality where grown;
    - Name and address of shipper, owner, or person shipping or forwarding the plants or seeds; and
    - Number of the written permit authorizing the importation (if written permit is required).

Buyers are responsible for making sure the seller provides **all** required information with the shipment.

4. Confirm that the exporter/seller has a phytosanitary certificate.

The phytosanitary certificate must be from the national plant protection organization of the country of origin. These certificates attest that products are pest- and disease-free.

5. Instruct the exporter/seller to use any required shipping labels you provide.

This is to ensure the plants or seeds are delivered to the correct APHIS Plant Inspection Station.

Need help with a different importing issue?

Visit Our Trade Contacts Directory

Plants and Seeds That Do Not Require a Permit

- Precleared bulbs of APHIS-approved taxa from an approved preclearance program
- Shipments of **12 or fewer plants**, only if no specific restriction applies
    - To check restrictions, see Plants With Special Requirements and Prohibited Plants and Agricultural Commodity Import Requirements.
- Most plants from Canada
- Sterile orchid plant cultures
- Most herbaceous seeds

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