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USDA Asks Americans to Protect Plants by Looking for Invasive Pests in April

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WASHINGTON, April 4, 2023—The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is declaring April 2023 [Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month](#) (IPPDAM). This national outreach month is dedicated to highlighting the impact of invasive plant pests and diseases on plants nationwide and informing Americans how they can help reduce their spread. IPPDAM aims to raise public awareness about the threat and how U.S. residents can help protect U.S. resources from hungry pests.

“Each year, invasive insects and plant diseases cause an estimated \$40 billion in damages to plants that sustain us,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

“Invasive species threaten our food security, agricultural livelihoods, and way of life. Luckily, there’s a lot we can do to protect our resources. This spring, familiarize yourself with the invasive pest quarantines in your area and do your part to avoid inadvertently moving invasive insects and plant diseases to new areas.”

“Many invasive plant pests and diseases are natural hitchhikers and can be hard to see. It’s all too easy to unintentionally move them to new areas,” said Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Moffitt. “Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month is a reminder to all of us to limit the spread of plant pests and diseases.”

Nonnative plant pests can hitchhike in untreated firewood, attach themselves to cars, boats, and other outdoor surfaces—or take a ride in the mail. They can travel to new areas on agricultural material such as soil, seeds, homegrown produce, and plants.

Invasive pests have few or no natural predators in their new environments, so their populations quickly outpace native species and spread. These nonnative plant pests and diseases disrupt our ecosystems and reduce biological diversity. Climate change can magnify the impact of invasive species by increasing the level of plant pest infestations and disease infection, allowing pests to produce more generations each year, and increasing their suitable habitat. We need the public’s help to protect our ecosystems, food supply, livelihoods, and way of life from the devastating impact invasive pests have on domestic plant health each year. Together we can make a difference.

To protect domestic plant health:

- Learn about possible quarantines in your area, as well as the signs of [invasive pest](#) infestation on wild plants and agriculture.
- Invasive plant pest egg masses on outdoor surfaces are easily mistaken for a smear of mud, so it’s important to clean your car and outdoor gear before traveling with them to new places.
- If you find signs of new invasive plant pests and diseases in your area, report them to your local [Extension office](#), [state department of agriculture](#) or your [USDA State Plant Health Director’s office](#).
- Don’t move untreated [firewood](#)—even if it looks pest-free on the outside. To avoid unintentionally spreading tree-killing beetles that hide in firewood, buy or source wood locally, or use certified, heat-treated firewood.
- Source your plants and seeds responsibly. When ordering online, ensure the plant is coming from a domestic source or follow import regulations. If you don’t know where an agricultural product is coming from, don’t buy it online. U.S. regulations apply to the importer of record—meaning the person

purchasing and importing the product from overseas—not the online merchant. Learn how to safely and [legally order plants and seeds online](#).

- Don't mail homegrown plants, fruits and vegetables to avoid inadvertently mailing a plant pest with them.
- When in doubt, contact your [local USDA State Plant Health Director's office](#) to find out what you need to do before buying seeds or plants online from an international vendor or before mailing homegrown agricultural goods.
- To comply with U.S. laws and avoid introducing new invasive species into the U.S., declare all agricultural items, including seeds, soil, and handicrafts to U.S. Customs and Border Protection for inspection when returning from overseas travel.

To share plant health protection messaging in April, join the conversation on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) and follow #IPPDAM on social media. To learn more about invasive plant pests and diseases in your area and how to stop them, visit [HungryPests.com](#)

IPPDAM Proclamation

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.