

Questions and Answers: Information for Owners of Confiscated Citrus Plants and Nursery Stock

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recently became aware of an online distributor shipping citrus plants from States quarantined for certain citrus pests and diseases to buyers in States outside of the quarantine areas. This is in violation of the Federal quarantine for citrus greening and its vector, Asian citrus psyllid, in several States, as well as the Federal quarantine for citrus canker in the State of Florida. The quarantines prohibit the interstate movement of citrus plants and plant materials from areas regulated for citrus greening, Asian citrus psyllid, and citrus canker. The movement of infected citrus is the most significant pathway for spreading citrus pests and diseases.

APHIS' Smuggling Interdiction and Trade Compliance (SITC) officers will be contacting buyers and confiscating citrus plants shipped in violation of Federal quarantines. If your tree is confiscated, the following information will help you to understand quarantine requirements and guide future purchases of citrus plants and nursery stock.

Q. How did USDA get my information?

A. SITC obtained buyer information from sales receipts acquired during the investigation of these violations. The receipts listed names, addresses, items, and dates of purchase.

Q. What will happen to my tree(s)?

A. Your tree(s) will be destroyed by a SITC officer, either through steam sterilization or incineration.

Q. Do I face any penalties?

A. No, you do not face any penalties at this point. If, after being visited by a SITC officer and told about citrus regulations, you continue to purchase regulated citrus material, you may be subject to penalties. Penalties can range from \$1,100 to \$60,000 based on authorities granted to USDA through the Plant Protection Act.

Q. Will I be compensated for the tree(s) USDA removes?

A. You should contact the vendor where you purchased the trees to seek reimbursement. USDA cannot reimburse you for the cost of confiscated trees.

Q. How can I be sure that I buy citrus trees from a reputable seller in the future?

A. Many nurseries and Web sites grow their own nursery stock or acquire the stock from citrus-producing States that are not quarantined. Generally, nurseries will tag plants with information about the State of origin and may also include a registration tag. The registration tag identifies the nursery where the plants originated. USDA personnel can check the origin of the citrus for you by using this number. You can also ask the nursery manager to verify the origin of the citrus. Web sites will usually include a disclaimer that they cannot ship to certain States and may also provide information about the origin of their nursery stock.

You should verify the origin of any citrus fruit, trees, or nursery stock with the seller and then check current quarantine information online at www.saveourcitrus.org. Please confirm the origin of the citrus plants and do not purchase plants if they are from a State that is quarantined. If in doubt, do not buy the citrus.

If you cannot find information on the origin of the plants, call the SITC hotline at (800) 877-3835.

Q. Which States are quarantined for citrus diseases?

A. States currently quarantined for citrus greening include Florida, Georgia, and portions of Louisiana (two parishes) and South Carolina (two counties). Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are also quarantined for citrus greening.

States and Territories quarantined for Asian citrus psyllid include Alabama, American Samoa, Florida, Georgia, Guam, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Puerto Rico, Texas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In addition, portions of South Carolina (three counties), Arizona (parts of Yuma county), and California (all of San Diego, Imperial, Los Angeles, and Orange counties, along with part of San Bernardino and Riverside) are quarantined for Asian citrus psyllid.

The entire State of Florida is currently quarantined due to citrus canker.

Q. What are the symptoms of citrus greening and citrus canker? What does an Asian citrus psyllid look like?

A. Trees infected with citrus greening produce fruits that are green, misshapen, and bitter, unsuitable for sale as fresh fruit or juice. Other symptoms include blotchy mottling of leaves and leaf yellowing that may appear on a single shoot or branch.

An adult Asian citrus psyllid, which spreads citrus greening, is not much larger than the head of a pin (2 to 3 mm in length). Insects feed on the leaves and stems of infected citrus trees, which become infected with the disease as well. The bacteria multiply in the insect and are transmitted to noninfected trees when saliva containing bacteria passes from the insect into its new host plant.

Citrus canker is a bacterial disease of citrus that causes premature leaf and fruit drop. The main symptoms are lesions on the leaves, stems, branches, and fruit of citrus trees. While not harmful to humans, the disease affects the health and marketability of infected fruit.

Q. My tree(s) looks healthy—will USDA still confiscate my tree(s)?

A. Yes. Although your tree(s) may appear healthy, citrus plants infected by the citrus greening bacteria may not show symptoms for years. In addition, symptoms of citrus canker and citrus greening can resemble those of other diseases and nutritional deficiencies.

Q. What can I do to stop the spread of citrus pests and diseases?

A. The safest approach is simply to not move citrus plants, ship citrus plants, or buy host citrus plants online unless you are absolutely sure the plant is not from an area that is quarantined for citrus greening, Asian citrus psyllid, or citrus canker.

If you own citrus plants, inspect them regularly for signs and symptoms of citrus disease. If you detect an infected plant or an Asian citrus psyllid, report it immediately by visiting www.saveourcitrus.org/report-it/.

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