How To Buy Plants and Seeds Online

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Are you a person or business that *buys* plants or seeds through an e-commerce site? You are an **importer**—and you will most likely need a permit.

If you are ordering or importing plants and seeds to be brought to the United States from another country, this information is for you.

Rule of thumb: Before shipping plants and seeds into the United States from another country, go to eFile and apply for a PPQ 587 permit. Odds are that you and your exporter will need it. eFile allows you to apply for and receive permits online to import plants and plant products, among other things.

Importer (Buyer) Responsibilities

Before purchasing seeds and plants for planting from another country via an e-commerce site, you–the importer/buyer–must:

1. **Go to eFile to apply for and obtain a PPQ 587 import permit (or a permit exemption) from APHIS** (See Importer Documents Explained below).
   - There is a chance that your desired plant or seed is not allowed in the United States or has special requirements. (See Plants With Special Requirements and Prohibited Plants and Seeds With Special Requirements and Prohibited Seeds pages to confirm.)
   - You are responsible for visiting eFile and applying for a PPQ 587 permit to find out. (Visit our eFile guide (3.77 MB) and follow the directions to apply.)
   - If the plant or seed requires a permit, send the permit to your exporter/seller to include in the package.
   - If the plant or seed is exempt, you will be notified that you do not need a permit. Send the exporter/seller that confirmation to include in your package. Keep a copy for your records.
2. Request shipping labels, if required under the permit conditions (see Importer Documents Explained below).
3. Instruct the exporter/seller to include an invoice that states the scientific name and quantity of plants or seeds in the shipment (see Shipping Label below).
4. Make sure the exporter/seller has a phytosanitary certificate from the National Plant Protection Organization of the country of origin.
5. Instruct the exporter/seller to use any required shipping labels you provide to ensure the plants or seeds are delivered to an APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine Inspection Station.

Importer Documents Explained

Expand All

Permit

It is the buyer's responsibility to make sure the seller complies with shipping and labeling requirements described in the permit.

An import permit issued by APHIS specifies which plant and seed species can enter the country and under what conditions. These conditions can include treatment, packaging, and shipping requirements, among other things. Only U.S. residents may apply for an import permit.

Most plants and seeds for planting require a PPQ 587 permit. Some plants and seeds are prohibited or restricted and may enter the United States only under a special permit and after meeting additional requirements. For more information, see [Plants With Special Requirements and Prohibited Plants](#) and [Seeds With Special Requirements and Prohibited Seeds](#).

Plants and seeds for planting that do **not** require an import permit include:

- Precleared bulbs of APHIS-approved taxa when from an approved preclearance program
- Shipments of 12 or fewer plants, only when there is no applicable specific restriction (see [Plants With Special Requirements and Prohibited Plants](#) and the [Agricultural Commodity Import Requirements](#) portal)
- Most plants from Canada
- Sterile cultures of orchid plants
- Most herbaceous seeds

Shipping Label

The instructions on the import permit will indicate whether a shipping label is required. Not all permits require shipping labels; only plant products imported by mail (U.S. Postal Service or courier, such as DHL, Fedex, UPS) require specific green and yellow labels. The shipping label includes the address of the APHIS Plant Inspection Station where the package must be sent. Each label is individually

numbered with a distinctive barcode.

Requesting a Shipping Label

If the import permit conditions require a shipping label, the buyer must:

1. You may obtain green and yellow shipping labels (PPQ Form 508) online. Simply log into [APHIS eFile](#), navigate to "My Activity," and search for your permit. On the permit details page, view and download your labels in the Plant Inspection Station Labels section. If you need assistance, email greenandyellowplantslabelrequest@usda.gov.
2. Send the electronic green and yellow shipping label to the seller. The seller must print the label using a color printer and attach it to the outside of the package per the instructions provided with the label.
3. Instruct the seller to include the buyer's 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.

Other Required Documents

All plants shipped into the United States must be accompanied by an invoice or packing list that includes the scientific names of the plants and their quantities.

Important: It is the responsibility of the buyer to ensure the seller includes the scientific name and quantity of plants on the invoice.

Marking and Identity of Imported Plants

Plants for planting imported by mail (U.S. Postal Service or courier, such as DHL, FedEx, UPS) must be:

- Accompanied by an invoice or packing list with identity (scientific names) and quantity of plants
- Correctly and plainly addressed and mailed to an APHIS Plant Inspection Station at one of the approved ports of entry listed on your import permit
- Accompanied by a separate sheet of paper within the package, plainly and correctly bearing the name, address, and telephone number of the intended

recipient

- Plainly and correctly describe on the outer container 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 for planting
  - Number of the written permit authorizing the importation, if one (written permit) is required

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