Seeds With Special Requirements and Prohibited Seeds

Last Modified:

Buying or selling seeds online? E-commerce itself may seem harmless, but some seeds pose a significant risk to the United States. These products may carry plant pests and pathogens or be a noxious weed. To safeguard U.S. agriculture, APHIS prohibits certain types of seeds from entering the United States and enforces special requirements for others—from permits and certificates to specific shipping and labeling needs.

Importers must check if seeds have special requirements before they can be shipped to the United States. Visit eFile, create an account (1.45 MB), and apply for a PPQ 587 permit to find out. This process can take up to 2 months, so plan accordingly with your exporter.

Seeds With Special Requirements

Expand All

Small Lots of Seed

While plants require both a permit *and* a phytosanitary certificate, some seeds only require a permit.

Apply for PPQ 587 permit in eFile if all the following conditions are met:

- Maximum of 50 seeds of 1 taxon (taxonomic category such as genus, species, cultivar) per packet OR a maximum weight of 10 grams of seed of 1 taxon per packet.
- Maximum of 50 seed packets per shipment.
- Seed is not a Federal noxious weed or parasitic plant, and it is not listed under Not Authorized Pending Pest Risk Analysis (NAPPRA) (see Prohibited Seeds below).
- Seed does not require an additional declaration on a phytosanitary certificate (see Plants for Planting Manual).
- Seed is not pelleted, coated, or embedded in growing media, seed tape, cloth, or similar materials (see Obscured Seeds below).
- Seed does not need treatment (see Seeds That Require Treatment below).
- Field/agricultural crop and vegetable seed meets the requirements of the Federal Seed Act import provisions in 7 CFR 361.
- Seed regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meets additional CITES requirements.
- Seed regulated under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) meets additional ESA requirements (see U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Endangered Species and Endangered Species Act). Seeds of threatened plants are not regulated if they come from cultivated plants.
- Seed is accompanied by an invoice that includes the name of the seller, scientific name of plant, country of origin, and seed lot code.
- Each seed packet is labeled with name of the seller, scientific name of plant, and country of origin.
- Seeds are free from pesticides.
- Seeds are securely packaged in packets or envelopes and sealed to prevent spillage.
- The shipment is sent to the APHIS Plant Inspection Station listed in the permit using a green and yellow shipping label.

Important: Small quantities of tomato and pepper seeds are not eligible for import under a PPQ 587 permit for Small Lots of Seed.

Obscured Seeds

Obscured seeds are seeds that are coated*, pelleted*, or embedded in tape, mats, or any other substrate that obscures visibility. This includes seeds in closed containers, such as cans, opaque packages, or educational kits that cannot be inspected because of obscured visibility. Because obscured seed cannot be properly inspected, it must meet the conditions below to enter the United States. Specifically, the shipment must include:

- Seeds that are generally admissible under a PPQ 587–Obscured Seed Permit to Import Plants and Plant Products, do not require treatment, have no specific restrictions, and are from an herbaceous plant. Woody plant seeds (from trees) are not eligible.
- A bare seed sample, which must accompany the shipment of obscured seed and be presented to the Customs and Border Protection-Agriculture Inspection (CBP-AI) Officer for inspection at the port of entry. An officially drawn and sealed sample of bare seed taken from the lot before it was coated, embedded, or pelleted and that is identified as “Official Seed Sample.”
- A phytosanitary certificate issued by the country of origin.
- A PPQ 587–Obscured Seed Permit to Import Plants and Plant Products.

***Coated seed:** Any seed unit covered with any substance that changes the size, shape, or weight of the original seed. Seeds coated with ingredients such as, but not limited to, dyes, pesticides, and rhizobia are excluded.

***Pelleted seed:** Any seed covered with a substance that changes the shape, size, or weight of the original seed to improve its plantability.

Seeds That Require Treatment

Seeds of the following plants must be treated at a U.S. port of entry before they will be released to the importer:

- *Abelmoschus* spp. (okra) seeds
- *Castanea* spp. (chestnut) seeds
- *Hibiscus* spp. (hibiscus, rose mallow) seeds
- *Lathyrus* spp. (peavine, sweet pea) seeds
- *Lens* spp. (lentils) seeds
- *Quercus* spp. (oak) seeds
- *Rutaceae* (citrus) family seeds

- *Vicia* spp. (fava bean, vetch) seeds

Guizotia abyssinica (niger) seeds can be treated at an APHIS-approved facility in the country of export prior to importation or at the first port of entry after arrival in the United States.

Seeds Regulated Under the Federal Seed Act

Shipments of agricultural and vegetable seeds regulated under the Federal Seed Act require a phytosanitary certificate from the seed's country of origin as well as a declaration from the importer that states the kind, variety, and origin of each lot of seed and its intended use. A PPQ 587–Permit to Import Plants or Plant Products also may be required. Additionally:

- Each container of seed must be labeled with the identification code or designation for the seed lot.
- Each container of treated seed must have a label that indicates what substance or process was used to treat the seed. Substance names used on the label shall be the commonly accepted, generic, or abbreviated chemical name.
- The seed must be free of Federal noxious weeds (no tolerance) and Federal Seed Act noxious weeds (with applicable tolerances).

You can find more information and view lists of agricultural and vegetable seeds regulated under the Federal Seed Act in 7 CFR 361.

Seeds of Endangered Plants

Seeds of certain endangered species are protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA). To import protected seed species, the buyer must obtain a PPQ 587–Permit To Import Plants or Plant Products. You may also be required to obtain a PPQ 621–Permit To Engage in the Business of Importing, Exporting or Re-Exporting Terrestrial Plants or Plant Products That Are Protected.

In addition, the seller must obtain a CITES Certificate/Permit from the country of origin. This document must accompany the shipment.

To view lists of plants protected under CITES and ESA, go to:

- CITES.org: See "Flora-Plants" toward the end of the list.

- APHIS Plants for Planting Manual

Seeds That Require Testing for Certain Diseases

Tomato and pepper seeds from all countries require testing for virus and viroid diseases. These seeds must be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate from the country of origin with the additional declarations. Please refer to the Plants for Planting Manual and the Agricultural Commodity Import Requirements portal for import requirements.

Important: Small quantities of tomato and pepper seeds are not eligible for import under a PPQ 587 permit for Small Lots of Seed.

Prohibited Seeds

Expand All

Seeds That Are Not Authorized Pending Risk Analysis

Not Authorized Pending Pest Risk Analysis (NAPPRA) plants is a category of regulated plants that cannot be imported into the United States until APHIS completes a pest risk analysis and puts mitigation measures in place. Small quantities of NAPPRA plants may be imported for experimental, therapeutic and development purposes under strict quarantine conditions with a controlled import permit (PPQ 588–Application for Permit to Import Prohibited Plants or Plant Products for Experimental Purposes).

Some plant species from a few countries are exempt from the NAPPRA restrictions based on pest risk assessment and trade history. Please refer to the NAPPRA web page (see the NAPPRA Lists section) to view lists of NAPPRA plants and country exemptions.

If you are importing a plant from a country for which there is a NAPPRA exemption, then you would need:

- Import permit for propagation (PPQ 587–Application for Permit to Import Plants or Plant Products)
- Phytosanitary certificate from country of origin

Federal Noxious Weeds

Seeds of Federal noxious weeds are prohibited from all countries. These seeds may only be imported for research in an APHIS-approved containment facility with a PPQ 526–Permit To Move Live Plant Pests, Biological Control Agents, or Noxious Weeds.

Seeds of Parasitic Plants

Seeds of parasitic plants are prohibited from all countries. These seeds may only be imported for research in an APHIS-approved containment facility with a PPQ 526–Permit To Move Live Plant Pests, Biological Control Agents, or Noxious Weeds.

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