

Importing Seeds into the US

Small Lots of Seed Program

For some years, it has been necessary to send a Phytosanitary Certificate with all seeds imported into the USA. This regulation was put in place because of fears that species of plants not native to the United States might spread and displace native species.

This has meant that it has been almost impossible for people in the United States to obtain seeds from other countries legally, which has been a serious difficulty for small seedhouses and specialist nurseries, as well as an inconvenience for ordinary gardeners who wished to exchange seeds with gardeners in other countries.

APHIS (the US Department responsible for Plant Health) have now relaxed these rules for the importation of small quantities of seed. It is no longer necessary to have such seed inspected and to obtain a Phytosanitary Certificate from the exporting country. Instead, the person in the US who wishes to import seeds on a small scale may now apply for an Import Permit which will allow them to bring seeds into the United States, subject to certain conditions. Details of how to obtain a Permit are on the APHIS website: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq/Q37/smallotsseed.html>.

The Permit is free, and is valid for three years. During that time, a resident in the US may import any number of lots of up to 50 packets of seed (each packet containing not more than 50 seeds), provided they are packed and labelled in accordance with the rules. Obviously, seeds of species which are normally prohibited are not allowed into the US under the new Small Lots of Seed Program. Seeds must be completely cleaned of soil, chaff, husks, etc., and complete fruits and berries are not allowed in under the new rules. More details are on the [APHIS website](#).

The new procedure will therefore be as follows:

- (a) The importer (in the US) will obtain a Small Lots of Seed Permit;
- (b) The importer will send a copy of the Permit, plus a special label addressed to an Inspection Station in the US, plus a self-addressed label, to the exporter (outside the US), whether it is a company, a society or an individual;
- (c) The exporter (outside the US) will send the seeds, packed and labelled as required, to the Inspection Station, using the label supplied, together with the copy of the Permit, a list of the seeds enclosed, and the label addressed to the importer (in the US);
- (d) The seeds will be checked at the Inspection Station and forwarded to the intended recipient.

Many international gardening societies are already aware of the procedure they need to follow to get seeds from their Distributions to their members in the US (the new system was worked out in conjunction with NARGS). As the Small Lots of Seed Program has only just been put into effect, it is likely that people in the US who wish to import seeds by buying from a foreign seedhouse or by exchanging seed with someone in another country will need to provide details of the new scheme to the exporter.

The following seem the questions most likely to arise about the new **Small Lots of Seed Program**. Click [here](#) to go to the FAQ page.

1. Do I need a Permit?
2. How do I get a Permit?
3. How much does it cost?
4. How long does it last?
5. How many seeds can I import with a Permit?
6. Do I need a separate Permit for each packet of seeds I import to the US?
7. Do I need a separate Permit for each type of seeds I import?
8. Can I import more than one lot of seeds with a Permit?
9. Do I need a separate Permit for each country I want to import seeds from?
10. How do I know which seeds are not allowed into the US?
11. Why do I get special mailing labels with my Permit?
12. What happens to my seeds at the Inspection Station?
13. Will I have to pay for the seeds to be inspected?
14. How many labels will I get?
15. What do I do with the labels?
16. What do I do with the Permit?
17. What do I have to send to the person outside the US when I am exchanging seeds?
18. What does the person sending seeds to the US have to do?

19. Can someone send me seeds still in berries or fruit?
20. Do the seeds have to be packed in any particular way?
21. Can the sender put the label inside the packet with the seeds?
22. Does the sender have to use a sticky label, or can they write the name directly on the packet?
23. Can the sender just list the seeds and give the packets a number, to save writing the names and other details on every packet?
24. Will the new system cost me more?
25. Can the person outside the US send extra packets of seeds?
26. Can I use the Permit to bring back seeds from another country myself?
27. Can I use the Permit to order seeds from seed suppliers outside the US?
28. What happens if I don't get a Permit?
29. What happens if I try and import seeds that are not allowed under the Small Lots of Seed Program?

Remember that the new Program only applies to the import of **small quantities of eligible seed**. If you want to import large quantities of seed, or types which are subject to special requirements, you will still need to get a Phytosanitary Certificate. All the rules about importing seed and other parts of plants into the US are on the [APHIS website](#).

There is a checklist of the requirements for packing, labelling and sending seed which it might be useful for the importer (in the US) to send to the exporter (outside the US) [here](#), and a suitable form to list seeds being sent into the US [here](#).