

An Update to the Mystery, Unsolicited packages of Seed – August 5, 2020

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On Wednesday, July 29th I distributed a news release that brought attention to mystery, unsolicited seeds delivered by mail in tiny bags marked as jewelry. The role of the USDA-Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is to safeguard U.S. agriculture and natural resources from the risks associated with the entry, establishment or spread of animal and plant pests and noxious weeds. Regulations prohibit or restrict the importation of living plants, plant parts and seeds for propagation. Texas Department of Agriculture Commissioner, Sid Miller advised Texans: ““I am urging folks to take this matter seriously,” Miller said in a press release. “An invasive plant species might not sound threatening, but these small invaders could destroy Texas agriculture. TDA has been working closely with USDA to analyze these unknown seeds so we can protect Texas residents.”

Texas residents are now among those across the nation receiving mysterious seeds delivered by mail in tiny bags. I’m aware of one Wharton County resident who received one of these packages of seed. This resident did exactly what we recommend, and the seeds were not planted. The seeds were kept in the package and sent on Monday of this week to the USDA Animal, Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) in Humble, Texas. Another unsolicited package of seeds was reported yesterday to have been received by a resident in Richmond. To date, packages containing these mystery seeds have also been received in Washington, Virginia, Utah, Kansas, Louisiana and Arizona.



Investigation is still ongoing, conducted by USDA, U.S. Customs and Borders, State Dept of Ag and some other federal agencies. Some of the seeds have been identified: include cabbage, mustard, kale, mint, sage, morning glory (generally noted by USDA as ornamental, fruit and vegetable, herb, and weed species). Further evaluation is made on some seeds for potential pathogens.

At this time, USDA-APHIS doesn't have any evidence indicating this is something other than a "brushing scam" where people receive unsolicited items from a seller who then posts false customer reviews to boost sales. USDA is currently collecting seed packages from recipients and will test their contents and determine if they contain anything that could be of concern to U.S. agriculture or the environment.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) urges anyone who receives an unsolicited package of seeds to mail those seeds to the location listed below for your state. If more than one location is listed for your state, please select the location closest to your residence.

Instructions for Mailing Seed Packets:

- Place the unopened seed packet and any packaging, including the mailing label, in a mailing envelope.
 - If the seed packets are open, first place the seeds and their packaging into a zip-lock bag, seal it, and then place everything into a mailing envelope.
- Please include your name, address and phone number so that a State or Federal Agriculture Official can contact you for additional information, if needed.
- In some cases, you may also submit your information online. Instructions are provided below if that is an option in your state.

If you are unable to mail the package to one of the locations below, please contact your APHIS State plant health director to arrange a no-contact pick up or to determine a convenient drop-off location.

Texas residents should choose the closest USDA-APHIS location:

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Attn: Elias Gonzalez
100 Los Indios Blvd.
Los Indios, Texas 78567

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Attn: Gerardo Gonzalez
120 San Francisco, Bridge II Complex
Building 5, Room 505
Laredo, Texas 78045

USDA-APHIS-PPQ
Houston PIS
Attn: Alejandro Gammon Officer in Charge
19581 Lee Road
Humble, TX, 77338

Updates on the unsolicited seed issue are posted on this USDA site.

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/newsroom/stakeholder-info/sa_by_date/sa-2020/sa-07/seeds-china

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corrie P. Bowen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Corrie" and last name "Bowen" clearly legible.

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The logo for Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. It features the text "TEXAS A&M" in a dark red, serif font at the top. Below it, the word "AGRILIFE" is written in a large, grey, serif font. At the bottom, the word "EXTENSION" is written in a bold, dark red, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a light yellow background.