

Plant Quarantine Protocols[®]

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INTRODUCTION

The risks of introducing exotic pests and diseases with nursery stock varies according to the species, country or area of origin, the conditions under which it has been grown and maintained, and the form and quantity in which it is imported.

Consequently, all nursery stock is subject to inspection on arrival in Australia. Most are subject to treatment and post-entry quarantine growth with diseases screening. Depending on their quarantine risk, nursery stock are housed either at Government nurseries or within secure private post entry quarantine facilities. Currently the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) have approved: 78 open quarantine facilities for approved bulbs, 35 closed quarantine facilities for medium risk nursery stock, and four open quarantine facilities for rose scion wood for budding.

IMPORTED PLANTS FALL INTO THREE MAIN CATEGORIES

High Risk. These are some prominent groups which pose a high quarantine risk either by acting as vehicles for the introduction of particularly damaging pests and diseases or because the species are perceived to be potential weeds. High-risk nursery stock material must undergo quarantine at a government post-entry quarantine facility. These high risk groups are:

- Commercial food, fibre, and energy crops
- Tree species of recreational and forestry importance
- Aquatic plants
- Various types of ornamentals that may be hosts of exotic diseases, e.g., hosts of fireblight, citrus canker, guava rust, moko diseases, etc.
- Specified weed species: e.g., aquatic, cacti, and acacia spp.
- Other plants requiring special conditions.

Current policy is to allow the introduction of most high risk plants as nursery stock subject to the availability of facilities and resources. Some high risk plants are currently not permitted entry due to the absence of adequate quarantine screening procedures. Quarantine policy relating to high risk plants is more restrictive (and the quarantine procedures more rigorous and lengthy). AQIS encourages industry to source material from reputable sources offshore.

Medium Risk. This includes all those plant species not listed as high risk. Plants in this category may undergo quarantine at private registered establishments. Examples of some of these are: bulbs and corms, orchids, bamboos, roses, approved cacti, and other ornamentals not included as high-risk nursery stock

Low Risk. There are two main groups of low-risk nursery stock.

- Tissue culture of medium-risk plants that are regarded as of sufficiently high-health status to allow them entry with no requirement for post-entry quarantine growth, only inspection on arrival.

- Elite stock that is produced by AQIS accredited sources, which is of such health status that it is permitted entry with no quarantine impediment.

IMPORT PERMITS

Import permits are required for all live plants, whole plants, or plant parts, such as cuttings, roots, bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, and tissue cultures. Importers must be in receipt of a valid permit to import quarantine material prior to the plants being landed in Australia. To apply for a permit importers must complete the application for permit to import quarantine material. This application form can be found on the AQIS web site <www.aqis.gov.au>. This web site provides advice on submitting applications, fees applicable and provides import requirements for a wide range of products subject to quarantine clearance. Importers must contact the nursery stock office or government nursery prior to submitting applications. The issuance of AQIS permits does not imply compliance with the requirements of any other Government organisation.

The only exception for not requiring an import permit at the present time are orchids imported as tissue cultures through international airports and accompanied by the importer (limits apply).

ICON

ICON is the AQIS import conditions database. It is a simple and convenient way to access information about Australian import conditions for more than 18,000 foreign plant, animal, mineral, and human commodities. It can be used to determine if a commodity intended for import to Australia needs a quarantine permit and/or treatment or if there are any other quarantine prerequisites. Importers are encouraged to use the AQIS web site: <www.aqis.gov.au/icon> which provides import case details for each specific plant species. Plant species not documented in ICON may require an AQIS plant introduction form.

AQIS PLANT INTRODUCTION FORM

AQIS in conjunction with Plant Biosecurity regulates all plant material imported into Australia. AQIS receives a large number of applications to import various plant species. Many of these species have been imported before and AQIS has developed import conditions to enable their safe introduction.

When an importer submits an application to import propagative material (seed or nursery stock) of a species that is not contained in ICON, or is listed as, “Prohibited Until Assessed”, Plant Biosecurity must conduct an assessment of the species so that appropriate conditions can be assigned. This assessment must be completed before the species can be imported and released from quarantine. This form is used to obtain information on the general growth characteristics of the species and also to determine whether the plant possesses certain attributes which could increase the likelihood of it becoming a weed in Australia. Based on the assessment of the information provided, Biosecurity will either (a) permit the plant to be imported subject to certain conditions, or (b) refuse permission for the plant to be imported, or (c) require further assessment of the species while in quarantine.

Plants that are already present in Australia, either widely distributed or commercially available in significant quantities in Australia, still require assessment, but the final result will take the occurrence in Australia into account.

NURSERY STOCK: SUMMARY OF GENERAL CONDITIONS

- 1) Importers must be in receipt of a valid permit to import plants prior to the plants being landed in Australia.
- 2) AQIS permit does not imply compliance with the requirements of other government agencies.
- 3) Material must be free from soil, disease symptoms, and other extraneous contamination.
- 4) Material must be packed in new containers.
- 5) Material must be labelled with scientific names along with appropriate packing lists (unidentified nursery stock is subject to re-export or destruction at cost to the importer).
- 6) Material must be made subject to quarantine inspection on landing in Australia. AQIS fees apply.
- 7) Most nursery stock receives quarantine treatment following its arrival in Australia. Material will be treated bare-rooted and this may affect plants that are established in potting media. Importers are urged to consider this when arranging importation.
- 8) Importers must make suitable arrangements with AQIS for any post-entry quarantine facilities prior to the goods arriving.
- 9) All rooted plants, with the exception of epiphytic orchids, plants derived from imported tissue cultures, and plants certified as having been grown in soilless media, must be treated with nematicide within 2 weeks of planting.
- 10) Failure to comply with permit conditions may result in the nursery stock being re-exported or destroyed or any quarantine procedures varied: at cost to the importer.

Note: For plants undergoing post-entry quarantine in an AQIS approved private facility, it is the responsibility of the importer to supply and prepare the nematicide under supervision of AQIS staff. Fungicides are not to be used on plants without prior approval from AQIS.

QUARANTINE ACT

All representatives of foreign governments, international organisations, industry, importers, and the travelling public arriving into Australia have a duty to comply with Australia's Quarantine Laws. AQIS is responsible for the administration of the Quarantine Act 1908 and its subordinate legislation: the Quarantine Proclamation 1998 and the Quarantine Regulations 2000. The Quarantine Act:

- Provides powers for quarantine officers to deal with quarantine matters.
- Sets out the legal basis for controlling the importing of goods, animals, and plants.
- Determines the offences for breaches of the Act.

There are Commonwealth, State, and Territory laws regulating quarantine.

Quarantine is about putting controls in place to maintain Australia's privileged human, animal, and plant health status. Effective and efficient quarantine controls are necessary to protect public health, provide competitive advantages in agricultural production, reducing the need to use chemicals to prevent and control pests and diseases, protecting native flora and fauna, and promoting Australia as a tourist attraction.