

Biosecurity: Navigating the System

A Good Advice Guide for Gardeners

The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc.

Australia's biosecurity system is a trade and economic asset. It underpins \$59 billion in agricultural production, \$45 billion of agricultural exports and our \$38 billion inbound tourism industry. Equally, national biosecurity efforts protect human health and social amenity and help to maintain our unique, biodiverse, natural environments: the Australian Bureau of Statistics valued Australia's environmental assets at over \$6 trillion at 30 June 2016.

Given the huge cost of invasive weeds to Australia's agricultural and pastoral industries (estimated at \$4 billion annually), the damage done by introduced species such as cane toads, European foxes and rabbits to the natural environment and the threats of introduced pests to industries such as beekeeping and fishing, it is understandable that Australia's biosecurity systems place stringent controls on importing plant products.

Over recent decades, gardeners have become aware of the decline in numbers of specialist nurseries and, on occasions, somewhat frustrated by the limited range of plants available through major retail chains that dominate plant sales.

Often the only solution for gardeners wishing to grow unusual plants, whether Australian natives or exotics, is to grow from seeds, bulbs or plants sourced from around Australia or from overseas. Inevitably this brings us into contact with the biosecurity system operating both nationally and in our own State or Territory.

Seeds

There are numerous companies, organisations and individuals around Australia offering seeds for sale. Any gardening magazine will contain some sources and various internet services are also available.

The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. recommends members of affiliates explore these Australian sources before importing from overseas.

While most gardeners identify their garden plants by 'common' name, when ordering seeds from a supplier some basic familiarity with scientific names of plants is an advantage and this skill can be acquired over time.

Gardeners may be intimidated by the published conditions that the Commonwealth, States and Territories impose on importing seeds or moving seeds from one State to another. While many of these restrictions are designed to apply to commercial operations – e.g. some States completely exclude seeds of genetically modified crops – and some restrictions or conditions of entry seem not to apply to gardeners, we need to be aware of all restrictions and take them very seriously.

Remember, gardeners have a very poor reputation historically as a source of plant pests and diseases in Australia.

The Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources sets conditions under which plant material can be imported into Australia. These conditions are designed to protect Australia from the risks of importing exotic weeds, pests and diseases.

Import conditions are set out in the department's Biosecurity Import Conditions System (BICON). This is an electronic system that helps you determine what import



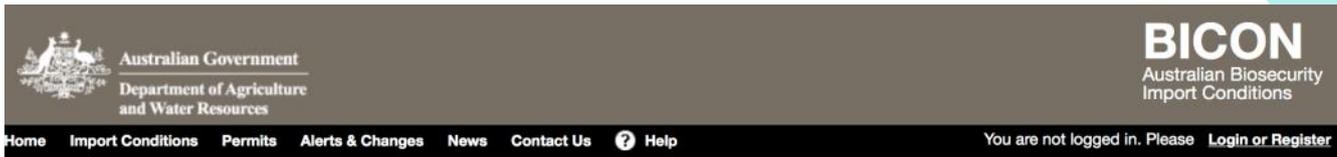
Above: There are no Hosta seeds included on the BICON listing. So Hosta seeds, like these from *Hosta 'Ginko Craig'*, a variegated hybrid, would not be permitted to enter Australia.



conditions exist and whether permits are required for any seeds that you might wish to import.

The following is a simple approach to accessing BICON:

1. Initially register as a BICON user by entering your email address and establishing a password.



Login

Please login to your account below, or you can [register for a new account](#).

2. How do I find out whether a seed species is permitted entry to Australia or not?

Search the complete BICON list of permitted species. On the BICON webpage below, you will find an extensive list of all permitted species:

<https://bicon.agriculture.gov.au/BiconWeb4.0/ViewElement/Element/CaseScientificNames?caseElementPk=240501>

If the species you are looking for is included in the above list, then you may import seeds from that particular species.

Please make sure not to order seeds from any species for which no entry can be found in the BICON database. These are prohibited entry into Australia!

REMEMBER THAT SOME STATES AND TERRITORIES HAVE EXCLUDED SOME SPECIES THAT ARE PERMITTED ON BICON. To check, consult the Biosecurity webpage in your State or Territory.

Although a species may not be prohibited entry into Australia, other requirements such as: certification of the identity of the seed; its cleanliness; having been processed to remove any possibility of disease and being packaged to a specific standard will apply. These conditions are well known, understood and are complied with by major international seed suppliers.

3. Importing bulbs, tubers, corms and plants from international sources.

This is a much more complex process. It can be expensive and very time-consuming. It will involve placing the material in a registered quarantine facility; the product is almost always subjected to a fumigation process which may kill the product; extensive growing-on time will be involved and supervised by biosecurity officers.

A number of large commercial companies do import such material successfully each year; however, unless you are a highly motivated and highly skilled grower, the Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. does not recommend that you import live plant material without extensive consultation with your local biosecurity office.

Further information on the modernising the importation of fresh produce can be found at:

www.agriculture.gov.au/import/goods/plant-products/fresh-produce-commercial-imports

¹ *Priorities for Australia's Biosecurity System*

² A list of sources of garden seeds is available on the GCA website: www.gardenclubs.org.au



Produced by The Garden Clubs of Australia Inc. Visit our website for information about gardening and garden clubs throughout Australia: www.gardenclubs.org.au