

# Importing Orchids

Plant import into the United States is overseen by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) (sometimes appended with Plant Protection and Quarantine or PPQ), hence USDA/APHIS/PPQ. Because orchids are covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the United States Department of the Interior (USDI), through the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), has delegated responsibility for the enforcement of CITES regulations to the USDA/APHIS/PPQ.

## WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO DO IN THE UNITED STATES

Obtain an import permit, which is free, from the USDA.

If you are a commercial firm intending to import CITES-regulated plants, you will need a General Permit as well (\$70), which is good for two years.

Be aware of the closest or most convenient Port of Entry through which your plants will enter the United States, and where they will be inspected.

## IF YOU ARE HAVING THE PLANTS SHIPPED TO YOU

Plan to have the plants arrive in the spring or early summer, because newly imported plants reestablish best during these times.

Work with your chosen vendor well in advance of the intended shipping date to ensure that you have chosen plants that are in stock and have provided the necessary permits and payments.

Emphasize to the seller that the plants and the paperwork must match exactly. Extra, bonus plants, or other undocumented plants may invalidate the documentation, causing the entire shipment to be refused entry, unless appropriate and proper documentation can be quickly arranged. Proper documentation is the responsibility of the vendor, and includes all pertinent export permits (if applicable and always for wild-collected plants), phytosanitary certificates and CITES papers. You will probably be charged a fee for this documentation.

Stress to the vendor that plants must be clean, clean, clean. Plants infested with pests (live or dead), or having the

appearance of being wild-collected, may result in the shipment being refused entry. It is not illegal to import wild-collected plants if they have the proper documentation. However, unless the

## Have the Exporter . . .

- ◆ Label the plants with waterproof labels firmly attached to each plant.
- ◆ Clean orchid plants thoroughly before packing. If any pests or diseases are found by the USDA, the entire container of plants must be treated. Original packing from infested plants cannot be reused.
- ◆ Pack each genus separately. If pests are found and treatment is necessary, it may be possible to treat only a single infested genus because pests are often genus-specific.
- ◆ Pack plants with adequate room for repacking after inspection. Over-stuffed boxes are difficult to repack without damaging plants.
- ◆ Be sure every plant is listed on the CITES certificate. Orchids not shown on the certificate will be denied entry.

The American Orchid Society is the world's leading provider of information about and related to orchids. We invite you to join us and learn about the world's most fascinating flowers and plants. Your membership entitles you to our monthly award-winning magazine *Orchids*, a free copy of our cultural book *Your First Orchid* and the *AOS Almanac*, a 10 percent discount on items purchased through The AOS BookShop,

and access to the largest pool of orchid experts ever assembled. All this and much more can be yours as a member of the AOS.

**American Orchid Society**  
6000 South Olive Avenue  
West Palm Beach, Florida 33405-4199  
561-585-8666 Fax 561-585-0654  
E-mail [TheAOS@compuserve.com](mailto:TheAOS@compuserve.com)  
WWW <http://orchidweb.org>

plants appear to be artificially propagated, matching the strict CITES interpretation, your paperwork may be invalidated if only good for artificially propagated plants. Your vendor should be instructed in no uncertain terms that unless the plants are absolutely, positively clean and appear sanitary, they should not be included.

Arrange shipment details well in advance. Air freight only seems expensive. The worldwide postal system is notoriously unreliable and subject to loss of shipments.

It is wise to place a copy of the documents on the outside of the shipping container, with the originals inside.

### IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO HAND-CARRY PLANTS WITH YOU

Know your Port of Entry.

Call or write all nurseries you intend to visit well in advance so they can begin to arrange necessary paperwork for you. It is rarely possible to simply walk into a nursery and obtain the necessary documentation the same day, even in the United States.

Labeling, cleanliness and documentation requirements are every bit as important as for plants you would have had shipped to you, except: CITES regulations permit the USDA to allow a United States resident to bring orchids into the country for his or her personal use (not for commercial purposes) as part of a shipment of household effects or as personal baggage without having to obtain a CITES permit, provided the plants are not listed on Appendix I. The exemption applies to Appendix II plants that have been artificially propagated. The exemption does not apply to those orchid plants that have been taken from the wild in countries that require an export permit.

Carry a copy of your permit with you.

Keep a copy of any import documents in your possession, as well as with the plants.

Be prepared to make arrangements to have the plants forwarded to you from the Plant Inspection Station at the Port of Entry, as it is not always possible (nor should it reasonably be expected) for the inspectors to deal with your plants while you wait for them to be inspected and cleared.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

CITES Appendix I plants are generally not available for international trade. These include: *Cattleya trianaei*, *Laelia jongheana*, *Laelia lobata*, *Dendrobium cruentum*, *Peristeria elata*, all *Paphiopedilum* species and all *Phragmipedium* species, *Renanthera imschootiana* and *Vanda coerulea*.

CITES Appendix II covers all other orchid species and hybrids. Wild-collected plants of Appendix II species are permissible as long as an appropriate permit accompanies them. Many countries do not issue permits for wild-collected plants. For this reason, get your permits prior to your visit.

Artificially propagated plants of Appendix I and II species and hybrids, sealed in sterile flasks, are exempt from CITES importation restrictions. In short, sterile flasks do not require CITES documentation for entry into the United States.

Plan ahead and be thorough. Do not expect it to be easy. Order extra plants to ensure survival of at least one of each desired plant. Once you've imported a species, keep it alive and spread it around.

### How to Get a Permit

If you are a private importer and wish to obtain a permit, write:  
USDA

APHIS Plant Inspection and Quarantine Permit Unit, Unit 136  
4700 River Road, Riverdale  
Maryland 20737-1236  
Telephone 301-734-8896 Fax 301-734-5786  
Web site [www.aphis.usda.gov](http://www.aphis.usda.gov)

#### Ports of Entry

Brownsville, Texas	956-548-2543
El Paso, Texas	915-872-4720/22
Honolulu, Hawaii	808-861-8492
Houston, Texas	281-443-2063
Linden, New Jersey	908-862-2012
Los Angeles, California	310-215-2120
Miami, Florida	305-526-2825
New Orleans, Louisiana	504-589-6731

New York (JFK), New York	718-553-1732
Nogales, Arizona	520-287-4783/84
Orlando, Florida	407-648-6856
San Diego, California	619-662-7333
San Francisco, California	650-876-9093
San Juan, Puerto Rico	787-253-4699
Seattle, Washington	206-764-6547

#### Designated Ports for Plants in the Orchidaceae Only

Chicago, Illinois	773-894-2920
Hilo, Hawaii	808-933-9630

#### Canadian Border Ports Designated for all CITES-Regulated Plants

Blaine, Washington	360-332-8891
Buffalo, New York	716-551-3828
Detroit, Michigan	734-942-7204
Port Huron, Michigan	810-985-6126
Rouses Point, New York	518-297-5391