United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education, and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

National Plant Germplasm System Procedures for Requesting and Shipping Germplasm

June 1, 2026

The USDA-ARS National Plant Germplasm System (NPGS) provides germplasm to professional plant breeders and other career research scientists at no charge. However, effective June 1, 2026, requesters are required to pay for shipping to receive plant germplasm from the NPGS. Furthermore, all germplasm recipients outside of the United States must provide, as necessary, an import permit or letter of authority for their request. The NPGS will not fulfill germplasm orders if the request does not comply with NPGS shipping or permit procedures.

Requesters will pay for shipping by sending a prepaid shipping label or waybill. NPGS staff will provide estimated parcel weight and dimensions based on reference box sizes and will confirm plant material being shipped complies with applicable phytosanitary requirements prior to release. Actual parcel size and weight may vary from estimates and may be greater than the size or weight of the plant material alone due to required packaging and regulatory handling procedures.

The prepaid label or waybill must be provided within three working days after it is requested by the NPGS. Orders may be delayed or canceled if a label is not received within this timeframe. If plant material cannot be shipped because it does not meet phytosanitary or regulatory requirements, NPGS staff will notify requesters. The requester is responsible for seeking cancellation or refund of any prepaid shipping label directly with the carrier. NPGS and USDA do not control carrier refund policies and are not responsible for shipping charges. The NPGS cannot invoice for shipping fees or use the requester's account to generate shipping labels. The requester may be required to provide multiple prepaid labels or waybills if the germplasm originates from multiple NPGS genebanks.

Please read the Frequently Asked Questions below for details.

Frequently Asked Questions about U.S. and International Shipping

1. *Which shipping couriers may I use when providing the prepaid label or waybill?*
   NPGS will only accept prepaid shipping labels or waybills from carriers that permit shipment of biological materials from the NPGS-site the requestor's order is sent from. Depending on the NPGS-site, possible couriers could include DHL, FedEx, UPS, USPS*. NPGS staff will consider accepting prepaid labels or waybills from other

couriers if feasible and approved through prior correspondence. *Listed alphabetically.

2. *When should I submit the prepaid label or waybill?*
   When requested by email from NPGS staff. The NPGS will provide you with estimated parcel weight and dimensions based on reference box sizes for use in obtaining the prepaid label or waybill. **After requested, you must provide the prepaid label or waybill within three working days**. Your timely response is critically important for international shipments. Delays in providing the international waybill could increase the likelihood of problems such as the parcel being rejected by inspectors upon arrival or the NPGS needing to obtain a replacement phytosanitary certificate.

3. *How should the prepaid label or waybill be submitted and in what format?*
   You or your selected courier needs to email the prepaid label or waybill to the NPGS staff who contact you about your shipment. PDF is the best format for the prepaid label or waybill.

4. *Do I need to arrange for pickup of the parcel?*
   No. NPGS staff will arrange transfer of the parcel to the courier you selected.

5. *Why may I need to provide more than one prepaid label or waybill?*
   The NPGS is comprised of genebanks at more than twenty locations around the U.S. Depending on the taxa requested, your order may be fulfilled by multiple genebanks which will send the germplasm in separate shipments.

6. *Should I submit separate requests for taxa that will be provided by separate genebanks so the subsequent prepaid labels or waybills will be easier to track?*
   No, this is unnecessary. The NPGS procedures to evaluate requests and fulfill orders are more efficient if you submit a single request for all taxa.

7. *Will I be able to monitor my shipment?*
   You can work with your carrier to track your shipment through any online tracking capabilities.

Frequently Asked Questions about Documentation for Foreign Requests:

1. *What does NPGS mean by import permit or letter of authority?*
   Generally speaking, these are documents that provide conditions under which living plant material may be imported to a country. These documents are possible available from a country's national plant protection organization (PPO).

2. *When should I submit the import permit or letter of authority?*
   Promptly, when contacted by NPGS staff asking for it. This will usually be immediately after we have received the request and are confident that we will be able to fulfill it based on your justification/intended use and our available inventory. You should determine how to obtain an import permit or letter of authority *before* submitting the germplasm request to the NPGS. You are encouraged to have already obtained the import permit or letter of authority when you submit the request.

3. *How should I submit the import permit or letter of authority?*
   You can either email the import permit or attach the import permit or letter of authority to your Web Order Request (WOR). The NPGS genebank(s) fulfilling your order may communicate their preference to you. To use the website option, you must be logged into the GRIN-Global (GG) website. Use the GG menu option "Your Profile" and select your request from the history option. There is an attachment feature for your order.

4. *What happens if the NPGS cannot meet the import permit requirements?*
   The NPGS will not provide germplasm when we cannot comply with the conditions required by the country to which it is being shipped.