



# The U.S. Plant Rescue Center Program



## What is the program?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established the Plant Rescue Center (PRC) Program in 1978 to care for plants confiscated by the U.S. Government due to non-compliance with the import or export requirements of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Service's Division of Management Authority (DMA) enlists botanical gardens, arboretums, zoological parks, and research institutions in the United States to volunteer as PRCs. Currently, more than 80 institutions in over 24 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico cooperate as PRCs.



## What are the criteria for becoming a PRC?

An institution interested in becoming part of the PRC Program should send a letter to DMA to apply for approval. DMA will send the requester a letter detailing the requirements to become a PRC. There are five basic requirements:



1. The PRC must be a public botanical garden, arboretum, zoological park, or research institution. It must be a governmental or privately funded nonprofit entity.

2. At their own expense, PRCs must be able to transfer confiscated plants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) port office to the PRC. In most cases, however, specimens will be mailed from the port office to the PRC free of charge to the PRC.

3. The USDA maintains each confiscated plant shipment as a unit. The PRC must accept and maintain the unit for 30 days in the event that the country of export or re-export requests its return.

4. The PRC may only incorporate confiscated plants into its own collection

if the country of export or re-export does not request their return within 30 days.

5. After the PRC incorporates the confiscated plants into its collection, it may display, propagate, or otherwise use them for purposes consistent with CITES. However, confiscated plants must be retained by the PRC and remain U.S. Government property. The PRC may not trade, sell, or otherwise dispose of them. However, propagules of these plants, which become the property of the PRC, may be traded, sold, or disposed of through other means.

Upon confirmation that the requirements have been met, DMA provides the institution with formal notification of acceptance and informs it of the following:

1. Prior to assigning a confiscated plant shipment, DMA will contact the PRC to identify available plants and ascertain the PRC's interest in receiving them. No plants will be sent to a PRC without its consent.

2. Plant shipments will be sent by USDA plant inspection officials. There will usually be no need for the PRC to make any arrangements other than to accept and maintain a shipment when it arrives. Occasionally, the PRC may be asked to transfer the shipment, at its own expense, from the plant inspection station to the PRC.

3. USDA will provide any quarantine or phytosanitary treatment necessary before plants are sent to the PRC.

4. The PRC must notify DMA by letter when the plants arrive, indicate the condition of the plants, and maintain the plant shipment as a unit for 30 days.

5. After 30 days, the PRC may display,



propagate, or use the plants for other purposes consistent with CITES.

6. Should the country of export or re-export ask for the return of the plants, that country is responsible for the cost of air freight of the shipment. The PRC would be asked to deliver the package to the nearest appropriate air cargo facility, as advised by DMA.

#### **What factors determine which PRCs receive which plants?**

Several factors determine where confiscated plants are sent. Expertise and limitations of the PRCs, the port at which the plants were seized, distance to an appropriate PRC, and weather, season, and climate are all factored into DMA's determination. Whenever possible and appropriate, plants held in Hawaii or Puerto Rico are assigned to local PRCs rather than to PRCs on the mainland. Keeping in mind all of these considerations, DMA tries to assign plants in such a way that most PRCs receive at least some plants each year.

#### **What is the PRC assignment procedure?**

1. A CITES plant shipment imported into the United States must be inspected by a USDA plant inspector at the port of import. If the inspector finds that the import does not comply with CITES, the shipment usually is confiscated.

2. Upon confiscation, the plant inspector contacts the appropriate USDA official at the headquarters in Riverdale, Maryland, who then contacts DMA. The plant inspector provides DMA with data on the quantity of plants, common or scientific names, country of export or re-export, name and address of the importer (and foreign exporter, if available), and USDA shipment control number.

3. DMA reviews the list of recent assignments and selects a candidate PRC to receive the shipment.

4. DMA contacts the PRC and confirms its interest and ability to receive the shipment, then advises USDA of the PRC selected.

5. USDA then packages the specimens for air or surface shipping and sends them, at U.S. Government expense in most cases, to the PRC. Only rarely will PRC officials be asked to pay shipping

charges or pick up specimens at the USDA port office.

6. DMA prepares correspondence to the PRC and USDA confirming the details of the assignment. DMA also prepares correspondence to notify appropriate officials in the country of export or re-export and inquire about their interest in the return of the shipment.

7. After 30 days, if the country of export or re-export has not claimed the shipment, it becomes part of the PRC's collection, subject to the stipulations stated above.

#### **Can plant shipments be returned to the country of export or re-export?**

Confiscated plant shipments are available for return to the country of export or re-export provided that an appropriate official in that country responds to DMA's letter within 30 days and arranges to cover return shipping costs. DMA will issue a CITES re-export certificate for shipments to be returned.

#### **How many plants are seized?**

Between 2006 and 2010, the USDA confiscated 680 plant shipments in violation of CITES. These shipments contained a total of 38,400 plants (27,270 orchids, 4,990 Venus flytraps, 3,239 cacti, 894 aloes, 821 euphorbias, 583 amaryllids, 307 cycads, 134 pitcher-plants, and 162 other species), plus an additional 3,933 seeds. Of these 680 shipments; 664 shipments containing 20,169 plants and 3,933 seeds were assigned to PRCs. The remaining 18,231 plants from 16 shipments perished at the port or were destroyed. No plants were returned to the countries of export.

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