

Imported pests and diseases are a threat to agriculture and our environment.
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Pests and diseases that have been carried into California by people continue to cause huge damage to agriculture, our environment and our native species.

Summer is the time when many families travel out of state. One of the great things about traveling to Hawaii, Latin American or the Caribbean is the chance to sample lots of exotic fruits and vegetables. It is very important, however not to bring any plant materials of any type back to California. That includes the fruit, roots, bulbs, leaves or seeds. A plant or fruit can look very healthy but can have the tiny eggs of an exotic pest hidden somewhere in them. Do not even bring plant materials from other states within America. This is difficult for people who want to bring something home from a relative's house or that was given to them by the friends they visited. Don't bring those cuttings or iris bulbs back from your grandmother's garden in New Jersey. Often travelers will want to bring a special preserved meat, fruit or vegetable home that is difficult to obtain in California. All of these items can carry a pest or disease that can cause great harm.

Imported pests are disastrous for agriculture because they cause great damage to plants. If an insect did not evolve here, its natural enemies did not evolve here either. Since there are not natural biological controls here to help control the pest its population explodes. If we have no biological controls we must rely on large amounts of pesticides to control it. This is expensive for farmers and hard on the natural predators and parasite that we need for controlling other agricultural pests.

Imported organisms can squeeze out native species that are important to us. Many introduced organism can out-compete our native plants and animals for their spot in the ecosystem. Introduced fish or birds can kill or simply squeeze out native species. There are many examples of introduced plants taking over a whole habitat.

If you see something you think would be fun to grow, your local full-service nursery can probably order it for you. If have an item you really want to bring home – contact the local department of agriculture and ask them to inspect it and give you a certificate to allow you to bring it back into California.

Dangerous diseases can be transported un-detected on clothes, shoes and meat products. If you visit a farm in another country, please let the USDA inspectors at the airport know so they can give you precautions to take when arriving home. Hoof and mouth and mad cow diseases have caused the sad destruction of hundreds of thousand of animals. Never visit a farm soon after visiting any third world country or anywhere that these diseases have occurred. Ask for precautions you can take if you are a farmer visiting these countries. Contact your Cooperative Extension or County Ag Commissioner for free assistance. Two great web sites to check before you leave are: www.cdfa.ca.gov and www.aphis.usda.gov/travel.