

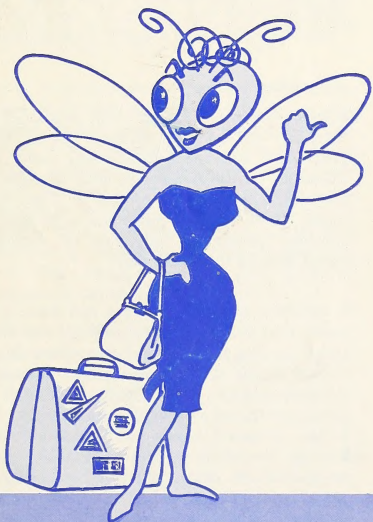
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DON'T HELP HITCHHIKERS



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Agricultural Research Service

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

DON'T HELP HITCHHIKERS



The international spread of insects, plant diseases, and other plant pests is greater today than ever, because travel and trade has increased greatly in recent years. These pests often hide in innocent-looking fruits, vegetables, bulbs, and seeds.

Plant pests now cost Americans approximately \$7 billion a year in damage to crops and ornamental plants. Many of these pests--including insects, mites, snails, nematodes, and plant diseases--are not native to America but have "hitchhiked" to this country from abroad.

How "Bugs" Travel

Plant pests often travel with people. The early colonists brought lice on their bodies, weevils in grain they carried for feed and seed, and plant diseases on shrubs which they brought along to make the new country look a little more like home. Once on this continent these pests spread rapidly, producing millions of offspring that swept across the new land.

A number of plant diseases and insects, such as stem rust fungus and hessian fly, two enemies of small grains that caused wheatless days in the United States during World War I, came to this country before 1800. During the 19th century, pests continued to come--in passenger baggage, cargo, nursery stock, and shipments of grain. During the 58 years prior to 1912, it has been estimated, at least 92 species of economically important insects were introduced into this country. These include such damaging ones as the horn fly, asparagus beetle, gypsy moth, San Jose scale, European red mite, greenbug, Argentine ant, boll weevil, European corn borer, and the alfalfa weevil.

Before the end of the 19th century, it became apparent that quarantines were needed to prevent this worldwide spread of plant pests. Most major European countries and many in Asia enacted plant quarantines before 1900.

U.S. Enacts Plant Quarantine

In 1912 Congress passed the Plant Quarantine Act. It gave the Secretary of Agriculture authority to issue quarantines, establish inspection procedures, apply treatments to remove pest hazards when plants are imported, and restrict or prohibit plant imports when no such treatments are available. Since 1912, only 30 significant insect pests of foreign origin are on record as having become established in the United States.

This sharp reduction in the number of pest invaders has occurred despite a huge increase in international travel and trade during the past half-century. Ocean travel increased greatly, and the air age arrived. Airplanes now bring over 4 million persons to the United States from abroad annually, modern jets spanning the ocean in a matter of a few hours. Pests that would have died during longer ocean voyages now may arrive in this country healthy and ready to attack crops and shrubs.

The Problem Today

Commercial shipments move through a system of permits and treatments that remove the danger of pest introduction. Plant materials brought by tourists present an entirely different problem. In order to minimize inconvenience to travelers, Plant Quarantine and Customs officers cooperate in baggage inspection. During the 1960-61 fiscal year, they inspected nearly 23 million pieces of incoming baggage--an average of one inspection every 1 and 1/2 seconds around the clock. More than 323,000 lots of prohibited plant material were seized, or an average of one lot every 90 seconds.

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Do not bring fruits, vegetables, meats, or meat products to the United States without first having inquired as to their entry status. Small lots which cannot be satisfactorily treated are subject to seizure at ports of entry.
- An advance permit is needed to bring in most admissible plants, bulbs, and cuttings. Get such permits before you go abroad.
- Report all fruits, vegetables, plants, bulbs, seeds, cuttings, meats, or meat products you have to agricultural quarantine or customs inspectors upon arrival in the United States.
- To obtain more information on plant quarantines or to apply for a permit to bring plant material to the United States, write to Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D.C.



Growth Through Agricultural Progress

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