



Import regulations for plant products

Stricter regulations on the import of plant material from third countries have been in force since 1 January 2020 – and they apply equally to private travellers. Importing live plant material such as plants, fruit, vegetables, cut flowers, seeds, etc. from third countries is now only possible with a phytosanitary certificate. There is also an import ban on goods with a high phytosanitary risk originating from certain third countries.

Key information in brief

These are the most important regulations that have been in force since 1 January 2020:

- **Certificate required to import goods from third countries:** Since 2020, plants and plant products (such as vegetables, fruit, cut flowers, seeds, wood, etc.) from countries outside the EU and the Principality of Liechtenstein may only be imported into Switzerland when accompanied by a valid phytosanitary certificate. Goods that require this certification are also subject to inspection upon importation. This also applies to private individuals bringing such goods into Switzerland in their personal baggage. Since 1 January 2020, only a limited list of fruits classified as posing no phytosanitary risk to Europe may be imported without a phytosanitary certificate: pineapples, coconuts, durians, bananas and dates.
- **Import ban on goods posing a high phytosanitary risk:** Experience has shown that certain plants and plant products carry a particularly high risk of introducing harmful organisms into Europe. An import ban has therefore been in place for such goods since 1 January 2020. For example, it is prohibited to import potato tubers, vines, citrus plants, soil and growing media from all non-EU countries.

Why strict import rules are necessary

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of new harmful organisms appearing in Switzerland and Europe in general, posing a significant threat to plant health. The main reasons for this are, in particular, **increasing international travel and trade**, which contribute significantly to the introduction of such organisms. Outbreaks of plant diseases and pests can cause serious losses in agricultural and horticultural production or significantly jeopardise the function of forests.

Previous import regulations were unable to prevent the increasingly frequent introduction of new harmful organisms, which is why stricter rules



and additional measures are needed in order to better protect plants. New harmful organisms spread most efficiently via infested plant material through global trade routes and individual travel, which is why stricter regulations and increased checks are necessary, particularly for imports.

General information

The phytosanitary risk depends on the origin of the goods, with the following distinctions being made:

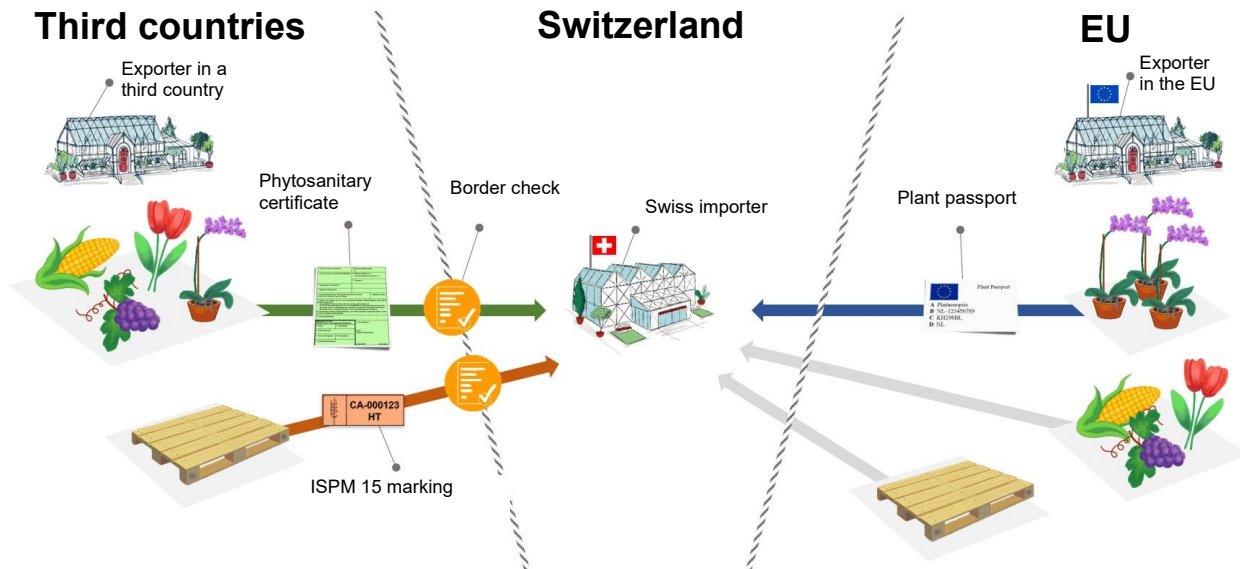
- **Third countries:** All countries outside Switzerland, the EU and the Principality of Liechtenstein. The Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla and French overseas departments and territories are also considered third countries in this context. Since 2021, the United Kingdom (with the exception of Northern Ireland) is also considered a third country.
- **EU member states, the Principality of Liechtenstein and Switzerland:** These countries have mutually recognised equivalent plant health provisions, which allows for the free movement of goods (without plant health import controls).

Where import is allowed, the following applies:

- Plant material imported from a **third country** requires a **phytosanitary certificate**. This official document is issued upon request by the plant protection service of the exporting country and must comply with the requirements of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).
- Plants and parts of plants intended for planting (potted plants, bulbs, scions, tubers, etc.) imported from the **EU** or the Principality of Liechtenstein must be accompanied by a **plant passport** (see [Annex 8](#) of the Plant Health Ordinance of the EAER and DETEC, which specifies which goods require a plant passport). The plant passport was introduced in Switzerland in 2002 as a simplified alternative to the phytosanitary certificate for trade with the EU. It confirms that the goods comply with plant health regulations and may only be issued by authorised companies and the competent authority in the country concerned.



In Switzerland, the Swiss Federal Plant Protection Service (SPPS) is responsible for plant health checks of regulated goods imported from third countries. These import checks are carried out at Zurich and Geneva airports. Due to the equivalence of phytosanitary provisions with those of the EU, plant products from third countries can also be imported into Switzerland via an EU member state; plant health checks generally take place at the first point of entry.



Simplified presentation of the documents and checks required for importing plant products from third countries and EU member states.

Import bans

Based on a risk analysis, a list of goods was drawn up whose import poses a high phytosanitary risk to Europe ([Annex 5, FOAG Ordinance on Phytosanitary Measures for Agriculture and Horticulture, PhyMO-FOAG; SR 916.202.1](#)). Woody plants in particular were identified as significant sources of new harmful organisms. An import ban has been in force for **goods that pose a high phytosanitary risk** (sometimes also referred to as 'high-risk plants') since 14 December 2019 in the EU, and since 1 January 2020 in Switzerland. These prohibited goods include:

- Plants intended for planting (other than seeds, in vitro material and bonsai) of the following genera or species: *Acacia*, *Acer*, *Albizia*, *Alnus*, *Annona*, *Bauhinia*, *Berberis*, *Betula*, *Caesalpinia*, *Cassia*, *Castanea*, *Cornus*, *Corylus*, *Crataegus*, *Diospyros*, *Fagus*, *Ficus carica*, *Fraxinus*, *Hamamelis*, *Jasminum*, *Juglans*, *Ligustrum*, *Lonicera*, *Malus*, *Nerium*, *Persea*, *Populus*, *Prunus*, *Quercus*, *Robinia*, *Salix*, *Sorbus*, *Taxus*, *Tilia* and *Ulmus*
- Plants and parts of plants of *Ullucus tuberosus* (ulluco)
- Fruits of *Momordica* (bitter gourd) from third countries or areas of third countries where the harmful organism *Thrips palmi* is known to occur and where no effective measures have been taken to contain it.

Third countries may apply for an exemption from the import ban for individual goods by submitting a comprehensive dossier. If a risk analysis (carried out by European Food Safety Authority) shows that the risk posed by a specific good from the third country concerned is acceptable, the import ban for that country will be lifted (subject to certain conditions, where applicable).

The Plant Health Ordinance of the EAER and DETEC (PHO-EAER-DETEC; SR 916.201) also contains lists of goods whose import into Switzerland from certain third countries is either prohibited or permitted only under certain conditions ([Annex 5](#), [6](#), and [7](#)). In addition, the FOAG may temporarily ban other goods on the basis of emergency measures if the plant health situation in a third country deteriorates significantly or new harmful organisms emerge.

In certain cases (e.g. research, diagnosis, variety selection, breeding, conservation of endangered plant resources or education), an **application** (in [German](#), [French](#) or [Italian](#)) may be made to the SPPS for authorisation to import or move particularly dangerous harmful organisms, soil, growing media or prohibited goods.

Phytosanitary certificate requirement

Since 1 January 2020, the import of **live plant material from third countries** generally requires a phytosanitary certificate issued by the exporting country. This applies not only to whole plants, but also living parts of plants such as fruit, vegetables, tubers, scions, roots, cut flowers, seeds, viable pollen, branches, leaves, wood, as well as forestry and agricultural machinery and vehicles, etc. (see [Annex 6](#), PHO-EAER-DETEC; SR 916.201).

The import of such goods from third countries must generally be declared to the SPPS via the TRACES-NT application one day prior to import, and the goods presented to the SPPS for inspection upon import. The requirement to provide a certificate also applies to the import of goods in personal luggage when travelling (including small quantities). Since 2020, the federal authorities have also stepped up checks in individual travel and in commercial goods movements at Swiss airports.

The following fruits may continue to be imported from third countries without a phytosanitary certificate: pineapple (*Ananas comosus*), coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), durian (*Durio zibethinus*), banana (*Musa*) and dates (*Phoenix dactilifera*). Based on current knowledge, importing these fruits does not pose a phytosanitary risk to Europe.



Wood packaging material

Wood packaging material can also be used to introduce particularly dangerous harmful organisms, such as the Asian longhorn beetle. Therefore, packaging made of wood from third countries must undergo (heat) treatment and be marked accordingly prior to import (in accordance with [ISPM No 15](#)).

Private travel

Prior to 2020, individual travellers entering from non-EU countries were allowed to bring in small quantities of fruit, vegetables (except potatoes) and cut flowers for personal use under simplified rules. **This exemption ceased to apply on 1 January 2020.** When travelling, plant material such as fruit, vegetables, seedlings, seeds, etc. from third countries must also be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate upon import. This applies not only to Switzerland, but also to the EU.

Plant material brought into Switzerland or the EU from third countries by individual travellers or via postal services often fail to meet phytosanitary requirements. To address this, companies providing private travel and postal/courier services have been required since 2020 to inform their customers about the relevant plant health regulations. International airports, transport companies operating internationally (both passengers and goods), postal services, as well as companies offering their goods through remote sales channels (e.g. online commerce) must provide private travellers or their customers with the information materials supplied by the SPPS and publish them on their websites.

Imports from the EU

The EU and Switzerland form a common phytosanitary area in which the plant passport system applies. For this reason, plant material may generally circulate freely under the bilateral agreement. However, plants and parts of plants intended for planting (e.g. scions, rootstocks, tubers, bulbs, roots and certain seeds) may only be imported into Switzerland from the EU with a plant passport (for further information, see the **User manual for the plant passport system**, available in [German](#), [French](#) and [Italian](#) only).

Individual travellers may bring plants from the EU into Switzerland in their **personal luggage** without a plant passport, provided that they are not used for professional or commercial purposes (i.e. for personal use only). The Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla, French overseas departments and territories, and the United Kingdom (with the exception of Northern Ireland) are considered third countries.

Exemptions

For prohibited goods, for goods that do not meet the import conditions, and for quarantine organisms, an exemption – known as an exceptional authorisation – may be granted in certain cases (e.g. research, diagnosis, variety selection, breeding, conservation of endangered plant resources or education). Goods imported with an authorisation are subject to restrictions on their use. They can therefore only be handled in quarantine facilities under strict safety measures.

If these are official federal or cantonal quarantine facilities, they are referred to as **quarantine stations**. They are used in particular when the SPPS assesses the risk of infestation as high to very high. Company premises can also be recognised by the SPPS as quarantine facilities; in this case, they are referred to as **closed facilities**. A closed facility is used, for example, to place goods under quarantine where the SPPS assesses the risk of infestation with regulated harmful organisms as low to medium.

Legal basis

The basic provisions relating to plant health are set out in the Federal Council's Ordinance on the Protection of Plants from Particularly Harmful Organisms (**Plant Health Ordinance**, [PHO; SR 916.20](#)). The Ordinance was adopted by the Federal Council on 31 October 2018 on the basis of the Agriculture Act and the Forest Act and has been in force since 1 January 2020.

The technical provisions and the lists of regulated goods and harmful organisms are set out in the **interdepartmental ordinance** of the EAER and DETEC ([PHO-EAER-DETEC; SR 916.201](#)), which has been in force since 1 January 2020. Specifically, this ordinance defines the quarantine organisms, the regulated non-quarantine organisms and the goods that may not be imported into or placed on the market in Switzerland, or may only be done so under certain conditions.

Emergency measures and temporary plant health regulations are regulated in two **ordinances** issued by the federal offices FOAG ([FOAG Ordinance on Phytosanitary Measures for Agriculture and Horticulture, PhyMO-FOAG; SR 916.202.1](#)) and the FOEN ([FOEN Ordinance on Phytosanitary Measures for the Forest, PhyMO-FOEN; SR 916.202.2](#)). This also includes import bans on goods classified as 'posing a high phytosanitary risk'.

Further information

Further information on importing plant products, the plant passport system and plant diseases and pests can be found at www.plant-health.ch.



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