

Front Lines

9/1/2020

Unsolicited Seeds

Chris Beytes



Of course, there are always dangers in ordering online—namely that you might not get what you ordered. Or, in this case, you might get something you didn't order at all. Folks around the country have been receiving strange envelopes from China labeled "Jewelry" (even though they didn't order jewelry from China) and upon opening the package they find it contains not jewelry, but an unidentified packet of seed. Some look like citrus seeds, others look like sunflower seeds and others are tiny little brown specks that could be anything.

This, of course, has the USDA expressing concern about invasive or harmful plant species, and rightfully so, which is why they're asking anyone who receives such a shipment to report it immediately to their state plant regulatory official or APHIS state plant health director. They're in the process of testing seeds now to see what they are and if they're anything to be worried about.

I've heard plenty of theories about what these seed shipments might be, but the most plausible comes from USDA, which says there's no evidence that it's anything more than a "brushing scam," where people receive unsolicited items from a seller who then posts fake glowing reviews on their behalf to boost sales. Websites like Amazon, eBay and Etsy only allow reviews of fulfilled orders, and these false shipments are how these scammers make that happen. **GP**