

Idaho Plant Quarantines and the Home Garden: Understanding the Laws

By Ariel Agenbroad and Susan Bell; photos by Ariel Agenbroad

When ordering plant material from a favorite catalog or online source, Idaho gardeners are often disappointed to discover that some planting stock is not available for shipment to the Gem State. In many southwestern Idaho counties, for example, gardeners question why garlic bulbs for planting are so hard to find each fall and why the selection is so limited. Frustrated gardeners may end up planting supermarket bulbs intended for culinary use without realizing Idaho law prohibits this practice!

What farmers know, but many home gardeners are just learning, is that the shipping, sale, and planting of some 70 food crop or nursery species in Idaho are governed by state quarantine laws overseen by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). These laws are in place to protect Idaho's important agricultural industries. They also impact home gardeners.



Photo by Ariel Agenbroad

What Idaho crop quarantines mean for home gardeners

Idaho quarantines exist for some 70 foods and flowers, according to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's (ISDA) 2010 rules. Our publication explores three examples to help home gardeners understand reasons for quarantines and ways they impact home gardeners. Crops discussed include:

- **Onion, garlic, leek, chive, shallot, and other *Allium*:** In 20 Idaho counties, all bulbs, sets or transplants must be certified for planting by the ISDA to be sure they are free of white rot disease (see p. 2).
- **Potatoes for planting:** seed potato tubers must be certified as disease free.

- **Nursery plants:** All plants coming into the state require inspection certificates.

For a list of all ISDA quarantined fruits, flowers, and vegetables, see the 18-page *Idaho State Department of Agriculture Summaries of External Quarantines*, at <http://www.agri.state.id.us/Categories/PlantsInsects/Quarantines/QuarantineLawsRules.php>

The ISDA recommends that anyone bringing into Idaho or selling in Idaho plants, agricultural or horticultural commodities, or nursery stock read through their publication. If you have questions, contact the Idaho State Department of Agriculture; 2270 Old Penitentiary Road,

Boise, Idaho 83712 (Mailing address is PO Box 790, Boise, Idaho 83701-0790). 208.332.8500; Fax 208.334.2170

Click on links to each crop's regulation from the above ISDA's publication, or Google "Idaho Administrative Code" followed by the number listed later in this text. For example, Idaho Administrative Code 02.06.07 for onions.

Violations of these quarantines are misdemeanors that carry up to \$3,000 in fines and/or up to 12 months in jail. (See <http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/idstat/Title22/T22C/H20.htm> and click on *Penalties for violations*.)

Why quarantines in Idaho?

Agriculture forms the backbone of Idaho's rural communities and is the leading natural resource-based industry in the state. Idaho farms and ranches produce more than 185 different commodities and rank among the top ten in the nation for 26 of these. Our superior products are in demand locally and worldwide. It is important to protect them.



Small whole potatoes or pieces are planted to produce more potatoes. Because they can carry potentially devastating diseases, all seed potatoes planted in Idaho home gardens must be certified as disease free by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture or by the state of origin.

Quarantines reduce the threat of entry and/or spread of harmful pests into the state that threaten Idaho agriculture. They may apply statewide, or be specific to certain counties. Quarantines protect against pests that may apply to a single crop or a range of crops. Even vehicles and machinery are subject to quarantine regulations. When all growers understand Idaho crop quarantines and how to comply, they take an active role in helping to safeguard Idaho farms and gardens against potentially devastating pests and diseases.

This publication focuses on the *Allium* family (onions, etc.), potatoes, and nursery plants as examples because transplants are the preferred way of planting each, and also because of their significance as Idaho commercial crops and the

potential devastation should diseases enter Idaho.

Allium—Onions, garlic, shallots and leeks: Beware of white rot

Background: According to the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee, more high-quality storage onions are grown in the sunny, fertile Snake River Valley of southwestern Idaho and eastern Oregon than in any other region in the United States. More than 20,000 acres of commercial onions are planted annually. Onions respond well to the region's rich volcanic soils and dry climate, yielding a unique combination of mild flavor, large size, and tight, dry skins. For these same reasons, onions are easy to grow and popular among home gardeners, too.

White rot (*Sclerotium cepivorum*) is a fungal disease of onions that occurs throughout the world. It is through infected sets, transplants, cloves, bulbs or bulblets that the white rot fungus can be brought into the state.



Planting garlic bulbs bought in grocery stores in home gardens is illegal in Idaho, an effort to protect commercial crops from disease. Instead, plant only true seeds or stock grown in one of the 21 Idaho/Oregon counties where crops are inspected and certified to be free of white rot.

The fungus forms sclerotia, or hard black “resting” structures that can live in the soil for up to 30 years. Only *Allium* species (such as onion, leek, garlic, and shallot) are susceptible. The disease is spread by water, wind, farm machinery, and plant material. Once the disease is in a field, growing *Allium* species in that location is extremely difficult. The only truly successful method of control is to prevent the fungus from ever entering a growing area.



Many home-grown onions often are from sets, or tiny onion bulbs. Idaho quarantine laws require that in Idaho all sets must be certified as disease free. Or, plant from seeds.

Quarantine rules for *Allium* family. *Allium* family quarantines are in effect throughout the United States, Canada, and all foreign countries.

Idaho Administrative Code 02.06.07 permits importing and planting of true seed because seeds do not carry white rot. But importing bulbs, cloves, sets or transplants of onion, garlic, leek, chive, shallot and other *Allium* grown where white rot might be present is prohibited by this rule.

Growers may purchase and plant only *Allium* bulbs, sets, or seedlings grown from seed or ISDA inspected planting stock within the boundaries of Idaho’s **white rot control areas** including these 21 counties: Ada, Bingham, Blaine, Boise, Bonneville, Canyon, Cassia, Elmore, Gem, Gooding, Jefferson, Jerome, Lincoln, Madison, Minidoka, Owyhee, Payette, Power, Twin Falls, and Washington in Idaho, and Malheur County in Oregon.

Impact on home gardeners

Most gardeners grow onions, shallots and garlic from sets, transplants, or cloves, not from seed. Onion sets look like miniature onions, about 1

inch in length and diameter, and will grow into a full sized bulb. An onion transplant is a seedling between 8 to 10 weeks old.

A clove is a small bulb structure—one of several—that makes up a whole garlic bulb or head. When planted, a single clove will multiply and produce a complete garlic bulb.

According to Idaho rules, gardeners living in one of the 21 quarantined counties can only buy bulbs, sets, and transplants that have been grown and inspected for planting purposes from inside the same area. This is why gardeners cannot order these materials from out of state catalogs and why they should not use onion sets, garlic, or shallot bulbs produced in other parts of the state or country.

A few home gardens within Idaho quarantine areas have been diagnosed with onion white rot due to gardeners bringing in and planting garlic from another state or from a grocery store. These gardens are now prohibited from any future production of any *Allium* species.

Gardeners in the 21 quarantined counties are permitted to save what they grow to plant back on their own property, but they cannot sell *Alliums* to others to plant, unless a growing season inspection was conducted and a paperwork chain-of-custody to the original certifying producer exists. Seeds for many common and unusual varieties of onion are available from garden centers and mail order catalogs.

Gardeners may freely grow onions, shallots, and leeks from true seed, which is not restricted and may be shipped into Idaho from outside the quarantine area. However, cultivated garlic plants do not produce true seed naturally, so gardeners are limited to the varieties currently being produced for planting in the quarantine areas.

Potatoes for planting must be certified

Background: Idaho has produced potatoes for more than 100 years. The unique texture, taste and performance of Idaho potatoes are attributed to southern Idaho’s climate of warm days and cool nights and its rich volcanic soil. According to the Idaho Potato Commission, Idaho has produced more potatoes than any other state every year since 1957.

Although literally billions of pounds of potatoes are planted and harvested each year, many

farmers and home gardeners have never even seen a potato seed. Only rarely will potato plants in North American climates develop aboveground fruit after flowering. Potato fruits resemble a small green tomato containing tiny seeds.

Each seed is genetically unique and, when planted, could develop into a different potato variety. Consequently, growers have long relied on planting pieces of potato tubers as “seed” to regenerate and reproduce consistent, identical copies (clones) of the parent plants. However, several devastating potato diseases such as late blight, *Fusarium* dry rot, soft rot, bacterial ring rot and others can be carried in the “seed” tubers.



Photo by Arfel Agenbroed

In Idaho, all potato tubers sold for planting on farms and in gardens must be inspected and certified to be free of disease.

These are reasons why all potatoes for planting must be regulated in Idaho. Quarantined areas include the United States, Canada, and all foreign countries.

Idaho seed potato rules. Idaho Administrative Code 22-501 restricts all potatoes for planting in Idaho to those that are certified and “accompanied by a certificate of inspection including the grade [size], findings of all inspections of each lot of seed, noting the name and amount of disease observed, and generation of the potatoes and shall show that the potatoes were packed, sealed, and tagged under the certification standards of the state, territory, or country in which they were produced.”

The law further states, “potatoes may not have a disease content that exceeds the standard for the last generation of certified seed potatoes according to the Idaho rules of certification as authorized under chapter 15, title 22, Idaho

Code. Potatoes imported from any other state, country, or territory shall be certified and also be in compliance with other applicable rules of the department pertaining to potatoes.

Impact on home gardeners

Purchasing and using certified potato seed tubers is the law. It’s also the first step in ensuring the most vigorous, high yielding crop. In Idaho, all potato tubers sold for planting on farms and in gardens must be inspected and certified to be relatively free of disease. Any tubers imported into Idaho for the purpose of planting must also be certified. Tubers sold for human food do not carry the required certifications and should never be used for home garden plantings.

Home gardeners should always look for proof of certification when buying potato seed, either locally at retail outlets and garden centers, or through mail order and online sources. If the seed stock from a particular source is not available for shipment into Idaho, then it is likely that the seed has not been certified.

Nursery stock requires inspection certificates from state of origin

Background: Greenhouse, nursery, landscape, and floral industries make up Idaho’s valuable “Green Industry.” An estimated \$50 million worth of Idaho-grown plants were sold in 2010. Over \$800 million are generated by these businesses in Idaho each year, and nearly 15,000 individuals are employed.

Since purchasing nursery stock is how most home gardeners acquire plant material,



Photo by Arfel Agenbroed

All nursery stock—plants, bulbs, sod, buds, corms, culms, roots, scions, grafts, cuttings, fruit pits, seeds of fruit, or plants collected in the wild, etc.—must pass ISDA inspection before being planted in home gardens.

monitoring these plants—especially those imported from out of state for potential invasive insects, weeds and disease—is important for the health of the industry. All incoming nursery stock must be accompanied by an inspection certificate signed by the regulatory agency of the state of origin. The list of the contents and origin of the items must be attached to the package or container. Further certification may be required for some nursery stock originating in areas covered by a state or federal quarantine.

Nursery stock, according to ISDA, “includes all botanically classified plants or any part thereof, such as herbaceous plants, bulbs, sod, buds, corms, culms, roots, scions, grafts, cuttings, fruit pits, seeds of fruits, forest and ornamental trees and shrubs, berry plants, and all trees, shrubs, vines, and plants collected in the wild that are grown or kept for propagation or sale.”

The term “does not include field and forage crops, seeds of grasses, cereal grains, vegetable crops and flowers, bulbs and tubers of vegetable crops, vegetables or fruit used for food or feed, cut trees or cut flowers unless stems or other portions thereof are intended for propagation.” However, state law still requires nurseries, growers, florists, and landscapers with a physical presence in Idaho to be licensed.

Impact on home gardeners

These rules protect home gardeners from being sold defective, diseased, or illegally collected wild plants. Gardeners should be aware of these rules and are strongly discouraged from attempting to bring in nursery stock purchased out of state, collecting wild plants, or purchasing from a non-licensed vendor.

Community groups or organizations wishing to hold plant sale fundraisers should know that, depending on their volume of sales, they may be required to obtain an Idaho Nursery License or exemption, issued from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO RESOURCES

While the following resources don't address quarantines, they do offer lots of help for growing many healthy garden and home landscape plants.

Idaho Landscapes and Gardens Online—<http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/idahogardens/>— U-Idaho horticulture faculty share timely, research based, unbiased landscaping, and gardening information just for Idaho.

University of Idaho Extension Master Gardener—<http://www.extension.uidaho.edu/mg/>—learn about Idaho's outstanding Master Gardener volunteer development program, meet our valued participants, find a class, and access resources on topics ranging from organic gardening to composting and growing vegetables.

University of Idaho Educational Communications offers publications and video titles related to home gardening. Many of the publications can be downloaded for free. See <http://www.cals.uidaho.edu/edComm/catalog.asp>. Consider these:

BUL 863 - *Choosing and Growing Adapted Vegetable Varieties* (Free to download)

CIS 800 - *Growing Vegetable Seedlings for Transplanting* (\$.35 or free to download)

BUL 617 - *Harvesting and Storing Fresh Garden Vegetables* (\$3 or free to download)

CIS 993 - *Management of Vegetable Diseases in Home Gardens* (\$.50 or free to download)

CIS 1153 - *Options for Storing Potatoes at Home* (Free to download)

BUL 775 - *Planning an Idaho Vegetable Garden* (\$4.50 or free to download)

CIS 1000 - *Potato Production in the Home Garden* (\$1 or free to download)

PNW 497 - *Short-Season Vegetable Gardening* (\$2 or free to download)

PNW 241 - *Alternatives for Specialty Produce* (Free to download)

OTHER RESOURCES

Idaho State Department of Agriculture—

Serves the agriculture industry and consumers through regulatory and service activities:

<http://www.agri.state.id.us/>

National Plant Board—A non-profit organization of the plant pest regulatory agencies of each of the states and Commonwealth of Puerto Rico:

<http://nationalplantboard.org/laws/index.html>

Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee—

Provides facts and information about onion production in the region and recipes for using Idaho-Eastern Oregon onions:

<http://www.bigonions.com>

Idaho Potato Commission—A state agency with many responsibilities, including the promotion of Idaho Potatoes.

<http://www.idahopotato.com/>

Idaho Nursery and Landscape Association

An organization of professionals including retail nurseries and garden centers, wholesale, growers, landscape contractors, maintenance firms, arborists, and allied trades.

<http://www.inlagrow.org/>

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