



Ornamental Plant Imports Stakeholder communique

June 2020

❖ Useful information

Buying from www.flowerseeds.co.nz: ‘co.nz’ doesn’t always mean you are buying local

Written by the Biosecurity Surveillance & Incursion Investigation Plant Health Team

You may have heard of www.flowerseeds.co.nz (Flowerseeds). It is a website that the Biosecurity Surveillance & Incursion Investigation Plant Health Team at MPI comes across on a regular basis because they sell a vast array of exotic seeds and bulbs from what appears to be a New Zealand-based website. But it is not!

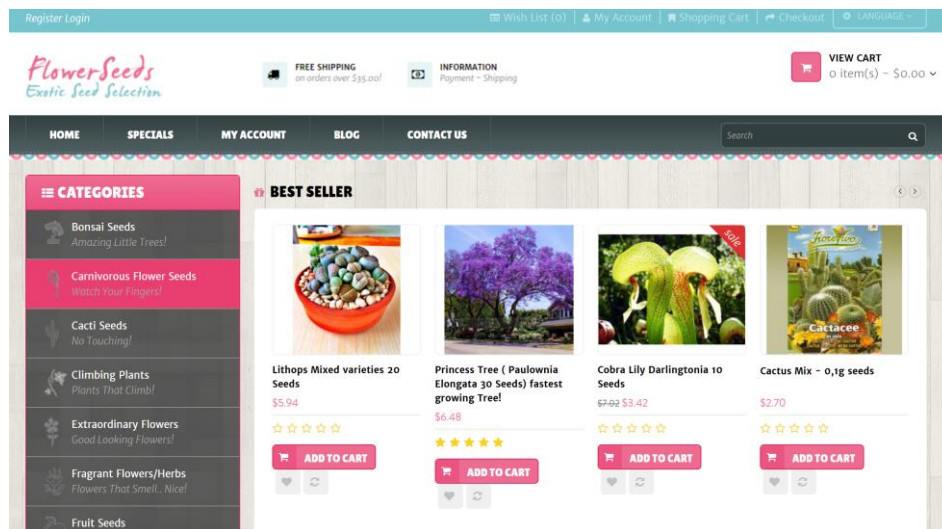


Figure 1: Screenshot of the site www.flowerseeds.co.nz.

The issue

Since the domain name was registered in 2012, customers of Flowerseeds have contacted the MPI exotic disease & pest hotline (0800 80 99 66) to report that the seeds they purchased had been sent directly from Greece and not New Zealand. Seeds and nursery stock can be imported if the species is approved by MPI through listing on the [Plant Biosecurity Index](#) (PBI) and by meeting the relevant Import Health Standard (IHS). The PBI is a database which lists plants that can or cannot be imported into New Zealand, and the requirements they must meet. If a plant does not appear on the PBI or is ‘Entry Prohibited’, it cannot be imported into New Zealand.

Seeds from Flowerseeds are often intercepted at the International Mail Centre as they are not on the PBI and/or do not meet the [Import Health Standard \(IHS\) 155.02.05: Seeds for Sowing](#). For instance, in 2017 an unsuspecting New Zealander purchased *Desmodium gyrans* seeds (telegraph plant) which Biosecurity NZ (BNZ) staff destroyed as the seeds for sowing IHS requires a phytosanitary certificate that was not provided.

Biosecurity NZ actions so far

BNZ contacted the Domain Name Commission (DNC) after discovering that Flowerseeds had misleadingly listed a New Zealand address under their store contact details. The occupants of this address were unaware of Flowerseeds and that they were falsely using their address. The DNC took action and the address was removed. However, they were permitted to retain the 'co.nz' domain name.

To avoid non-compliant seed arriving in the country, BNZ recommended Flowerseeds remove species from their website that were not on the PBI and seeds that were not 'basic'. Further, the 'basic' seeds are correctly labelled with their scientific names. Flowerseeds took heed of the recommendation and listed non-complying seeds as 'Out Of Stock' for New Zealand customers. It is not possible for the customer to proceed to the 'checkout' if they have added any non-basic seed to their cart.

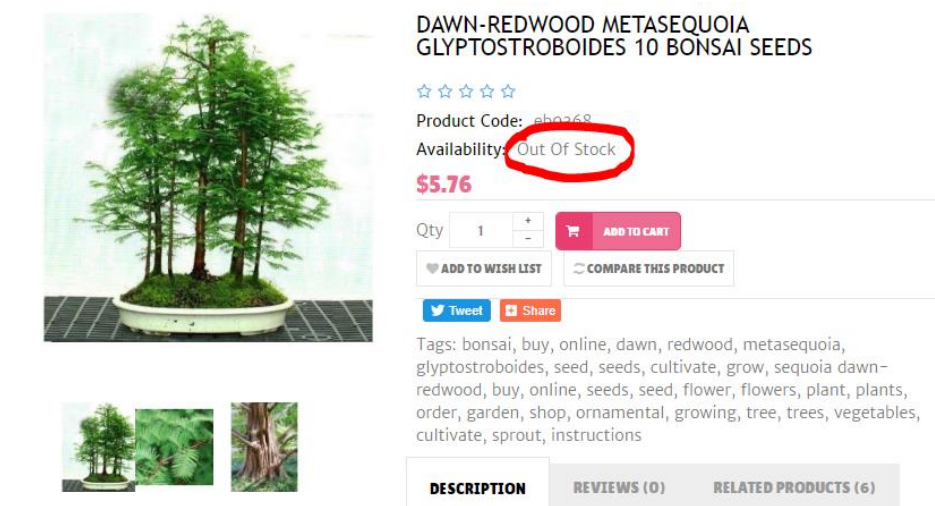


Figure 2: Seeds not on the PBI and seeds that are not 'basic' appear as 'out of stock' for New Zealand consumers.

Following the correspondence with BNZ, Flowerseeds also added under the 'INFORMATION: payment-shipping' button a notice to customers that all orders are shipped directly from suppliers outside New Zealand, and that they attempt to ensure seeds listed are eligible for import to New Zealand. They also advise that importers and buyers should check biosecurity requirements as the legal obligation to meet those requirements lies with the buyer.

What you can do

Make sure you and your contacts know where your seeds are coming from. Read the fine print before buying seeds online, even if the domain name is 'co.nz.' If the supplier ships directly from overseas, it is your responsibility to make sure those seeds meet the IHS 155.02.05: *Seeds for Sowing* requirements before clicking 'buy'. Contact PlantImports@mpi.govt.nz for any questions about importing seeds.