

For immediate release

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Can you imagine a world without plants?

On the inaugural International Day of Plant Health, Greenlife Industry Australia is encouraging all Australians, especially house and garden plant lovers, to purchase their plants locally to avoid introducing deadly plant pests and disease into the country that could wipe out the horticulture industry.

“Gardens have long held a place in the hearts of many, but plants have many more benefits for our communities than purely their aesthetic value,” says John McDonald, Greenlife Industry Australia’s National Biosecurity Manager, “Without plants, there would be no life on our planet.”

In an increasingly urbanised world, plants are making our cities more liveable. Trees reduce temperatures by up to 8 degrees Celsius, reducing air conditioner use and carbon emissions by an estimated 12-15% per annum. Large healthy trees remove approximately 70 times more air pollution than smaller healthy trees. People working in a place with plants and trees are 17% more productive than people working in bare spaces¹.

Plants make people happy. So, it is no surprise that the current demand for house and garden plants continues unabated, with greenlife retailers experiencing strong growth in their sales. However, consumers are also looking overseas to satisfy their plant cravings, with potentially devastating implications for the local horticulture industry.

In April 2021, Australia narrowly averted a potential biosecurity breach of great significance, when two packages were intercepted at the Sydney Mail Centre containing live plants and cuttings known to be hosts of *Xylella fastidiosa* (Pierce’s disease), Australia’s top priority plant pathogen². This bacterium does not impact human health but kills plants by damaging their water conducting system (xylem), which shows as leaf scorching.

The known host range of *Xylella* is expanding. Many landscape species such as elms, maples, oaks and oleander are affected, along with important garden and cropping plants including citrus, grapes, olives, almond, peach and coffee. Regulated plant genera also include popular indoor plants such as Saintpaulia (African Violets) and Strelitzia (Birds of Paradise).

“We all love the ease and convenience of purchasing plants online,” says John, “However, purchasing them from un reputable sources overseas could introduce serious plant pests and diseases into Australia, placing our industry and environment at great risk.”

“Even if your garden is only as small as your apartment or balcony, all Australians have a responsibility to uphold and protect our biosecurity status by keeping it free of plant pests and diseases,” urges John, “Buy your plant purchases locally to avoid unknowingly importing exotic plant pests and diseases such as *Xylella* into our country.”

Use Greenlife Industry Australia’s Store Finder to find your nearest reputable garden centre:
www.plantpals.com.au.

References

1. Greenlife Industry Australia 2019, *Australia's Urban Greenlife*, viewed 10 May 2022, <https://www.greenlifeindustry.com.au/static/uploads/files/infograph-australias-urban-greenlife-final-wfepgestgxcd.pdf>
2. The Hon David Littleproud MP 2021, 'Top plant disease risk intercepted at mail centre', media release, 6 April 2021, <https://minister.awe.gov.au/littleproud/media-releases/mail-interception-xylella>

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***Leading the Greening of Australia** - The Australian greenlife industry is a community contributing to Australia and all Australians through the uniqueness and diversity of its product and its people. The industry encompasses the ornamental market and supplies starter plants for fruit and vegetable production and stock for landscaping, forestry and revegetation. The importance of the industry cannot be understated as it significantly underpins the food, fibre and foliage plant production in Australia, contributes significantly to the economy and provides aesthetic and scientific solutions to climate change.*