

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## CACTI GET WIDER PROTECTION UNDER NEW INTERPRETATION OF ENDANGERED SPECIES TREATY

Beginning September 15, importers bringing cacti into the United States from any part of the world will need an export document from the foreign country, officials of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Interior have announced. The documents will have to be obtained from the country of origin or intermediate exporting country.

Currently, only nations in the Western Hemisphere are required to provide such documents for cacti, which are protected by an international treaty that regulates world trade in endangered species.

In general, the ruling will affect only commercial importers of cacti. It will largely exempt U.S. residents bringing cacti in as part of their personal baggage except for some rare species and to meet applicable foreign laws.

It was a legal interpretation of one part of the treaty that led to the new requirement, according to Harvey Ford, deputy administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

"The listing of the plant family Cactaceae includes the phrase 'all in the Americas,'" he said. "That had been interpreted to mean only those cactus plants now physically located in the Western Hemisphere. Government lawyers, however, say the term refers to all cacti which originally were native only to the Western Hemisphere. This includes cacti that long ago became established in other parts of the world and now constitute a major volume of the worldwide trade in these plants."

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Ford said that while not every species of cacti is imperiled, the entire family is covered in the treaty because of the intense pressure of collecting and the fact that one species often is indistinguishable from another.

The passion for plants in the United States is as strong as ever, according to Ford, who says cacti are next in popularity to tropical foliage plants and orchids. USDA import figures show that importers brought 6,850,000 cacti and succulents here from more than 50 countries during the period October 1977 through September 1978.

"Collecting and trading these plants can virtually eradicate the species in the wild," said Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which implements the international endangered species treaty in this country. "Several species of cacti with unique natural habitats already have become extinct," he said, "but treaty provisions such as the one permitting trade only in artificially propagated cacti should relieve the pressure on wild plants and eventually end such losses."

The USDA agency was assigned to enforce treaty regulations because its port inspectors already examine incoming plants for plants pests. Cacti imported without the proper documents will be held and either returned to the country of origin or turned over to federally designated plant "rescue centers."

Information on where to obtain documents for importing endangered plants may be obtained from the Wildlife Permit Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240; telephone 703/235-1903.

For details on agricultural permits to make certain no foreign plant pests enter the United States, contact the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Information Division, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1150 South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250; telephone 301/436-8411.

Notice of the new requirement was published in the August 25, 1980, Federal Register.

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