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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WSU Master Gardeners urge caution, awareness of unsolicited seeds

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Experts with the Washington State University Extension Master Gardener Program urge gardeners to be aware of and report unsolicited seeds mailed from overseas.

National and state agricultural regulators report that residents throughout the U.S. have received unsolicited packages of seeds, the majority of which appear to come from China. In Washington state, several residents received packages labeled as jewelry, but found seeds inside.

Unidentified seeds may be invasive, or harbor pests and diseases.

The WSU Master Gardener program has asked its network of more than 4,000 trained volunteer educators to be aware of the risks from unsolicited and unidentified seeds, and to assist Washington communities in safeguarding their local environment and agriculture.

"Our volunteers are often the state's first line of defense in identifying and stopping invasive species and threats to the environment," said Jennifer Marquis, WSU Master Gardener Program Leader. "It's important for all of our volunteers and partners to know the potential dangers, understand where to seek help and information, and to share this information with their neighbors."

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, unsolicited seeds appear to be mailed to allow online sellers to post fake customer reviews. The USDA is collecting seed packages, and will test them to learn if they could be harmful to agriculture or the domestic environment.

Citizens who receive unexpected international seed packages should not open the seed packets or plant the seeds. Regulators ask that Washington state residents place seeds and their packaging in a plastic bag and mail them to USDA for investigation. Washington residents can submit suspect seeds to: USDA-APHIS-PPQ – Attn: Jason Allen, Seattle Plant Inspection Station, 835 South 192nd Street, Bldg D, Ste 1600, Seatac, WA 98148.

Residents who have already planted the seeds should leave plants where they are, and contact Tim St. Germain, USDA-APHIS State Plant Health Director, at Timothy.StGermain@usda.gov or (253) 944-2040. Additionally, questions about submitting seeds locally should also be sent to the State Plant Health Director at the same contact info above.

Master Gardeners is a WSU Extension program, which is available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.