

# Plants, Cut Flowers, Starts, Seeds

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## Reason for Standard

Growing, harvesting, and transporting cut flowers, plants, garden starts, and seeds for retail sale can have enormous social and environmental impacts, resulting from pesticide use, pollution, unfair labor practices, and energy and water consumption.<sup>i</sup>

Similar to produce, many of the potential negative social and environmental impacts associated with edible plant starts and seeds can be addressed through organic certification. Organic plant starts help consumers minimize or eliminate the potential presence of toxic pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and genetic engineering from their home gardens. Equally important are organic seeds, which are not products of genetic engineering and are not treated with toxic pesticides, like neonicotinoids that harm pollinators.<sup>ii,iii</sup>

In the ornamental plants and cut flowers industries, the concept of sustainability, both social and environmental, is developing as professionals in those fields and their customers become more aware of such issues.<sup>iv</sup> The development of sustainability certifications for floriculture has been slow and thus, adoption of greater sustainability initiatives and improvements in the industry has also been slow.<sup>v</sup>

As globalization has increased the knowledge and availability of plants, it has caused invasive species to take hold in gardens across the nation. Home gardeners can purchase plants online or at garden centers, finding them visually appealing, and not realizing they are invasive species.<sup>vi</sup> Some invasive species are regulated more strictly, but not all of them. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) does maintain a list of “Class A Quarantine Plants” for which sale and distribution are prohibited.<sup>vii</sup> However, there are still many invasive species, like English Ivy, which are not on this list and can be found at nurseries and garden shops.

PCC’s plants, cut flowers, starts, and seeds standard was created to address many of the concerns and priorities outlined above. However, the ornamental plants and cut flowers industry itself still has significant progress to make, as there is little data on various sustainability metrics, few robust certifications, and minimal government regulations. As the industry evolves, so will PCC’s standard.

## Scope

This standard applies to all cut flowers, ornamental plants, edible plant starts, and seeds sold at PCC.

## Standard

### 1. General Criteria

- 1.1. PCC gives priority to local vendors and in-season flowers and plants.
- 1.2. PCC prioritizes vendors that are transparent about growing, harvesting, and other practices that determine a product’s sustainability.
- 1.3. Vendors are encouraged to pursue third-party certifications that set standards to protect workers, minimize environmental impacts, and limit pesticide use.

## 2. Cut Flowers

2.1. All roses sold at PCC must be certified by Veriflora Sustainably Grown.

## 3. Ornamental Plants

3.1. PCC avoids selling any species that is known to be invasive or considered a noxious weed in the Pacific Northwest, as identified by the [Washington Invasive Species Council](#).

## 4. Edible Plant Starts

4.1. All starts must be certified USDA organic, unless commercially unavailable.

4.2. Starts cannot be plant varieties invasive to the Pacific Northwest.

## 5. Seeds

5.1. All seeds for food crops must be certified USDA organic.

## Standard-Specific Glossary

**Floriculture** is a segment of horticulture that focuses on the production of flowers and foliage for decorative use. The plants grown are for houseplants, home gardens, and cut flowers.

**Invasive species** are defined as species that are non-native to an ecosystem and whose introduction poses an economic, environmental, or human health threat. Invasive species tend to produce large quantities of seed, propagate quickly, and are difficult to control. They are dangerous because they can kill off native species, reduce biodiversity, and negatively impact soil and water health.

**Ornamental plants** are those grown for decorative or aesthetic purposes.

**Starts** or seedlings are baby plants grown from seed by an individual or company with the intention that they will be grown by someone else. Often, starts have already been acclimated to outdoor weather and will survive being planted outside by customers when purchased from a retailer. Starts can be for ornamental plants or food crops.

**VeriFlora** is a sustainability certification program for cut flowers and potted plants administered by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) Global Services, a third-party certifier of environmental, sustainability, and agricultural quality claims. The VeriFlora label ensures flowers and plants have been cultivated in a way that protects human rights and the environment.

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<sup>i</sup> Andrew Korfhage, "Say It With Organic Flowers," *Green America* (blog), accessed March 5, 2021, <https://www.greenamerica.org/green-living/say-it-organic-flowers>.

<sup>ii</sup> Organic Seed Alliance, "Why Organic Seed?," OSA, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://stateoforganicseed.org/why-organic-seed/>.

<sup>iii</sup> Daniel Raichel, "10 Things You Always Wanted to Know About Neonics," *NRDC* (blog), November 9, 2018, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/daniel-raichel/ten-things-you-always-wanted-know-about-neonics>.

<sup>iv</sup> Stephanie Burnett et al., "Floriculture Sustainability Research Coalition: Bringing the Latest Sustainability Research to the Industry," *HortTechnology* 21, no. 6 (December 1, 2011): 692–93, <https://doi.org/10.21273/HORTTECH.21.6.692>.

<sup>v</sup> Tanya J. Hall et al., "Barriers to Adopting Sustainable Floriculture Certification," *HortScience* 45, no. 5 (May 1, 2010): 778–83, <https://doi.org/10.21273/HORTSCI.45.5.778>.

<sup>vi</sup> "16 Invasive Species Sold at Garden Centers You Should Never Buy," *Epic Gardening* (blog), November 30, 2019, <https://www.epicgardening.com/invasive-species-sold-at-garden-centers/>.

<sup>vii</sup> "Noxious Weeds Index: Quarantine List," Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board, accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.nwcb.wa.gov/noxious-weed-quarantine-list>.