Getting unordered seeds and stuff in the mail?

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by
Jennifer Leach
Associate Director, Division of Consumer and Business Education, FTC

Those mysterious seeds from China have been in the headlines, but we’re also hearing about other stuff that people are getting that looks connected to the seed mystery. There could be a few things going on, so let’s start unraveling the Great Unwanted Goods Mystery of 2020.

First, DON’T PLANT MYSTERY SEEDS. And don’t throw them away. Instead, follow the USDA’s advice on what to do.

Did you order something and get seeds or other junk instead? If that’s you, dispute the charges for the thing you didn’t get. We hear that some sellers might be sending stuff so they can show payment companies the tracking numbers to prove they delivered something to you. So: tell the payment service you used (PayPal, for example), and your credit or debit card company right away that you got seeds, never got anything, or got something other than what you ordered. If the seller tries to use a tracking number to prove it delivered, point out anything to show that it’s not credible — maybe a weight listed that’s different from the package you got, or a different delivery address.

You might have read about the “brushing” scam. In this one, somebody sends you stuff, unordered, because it lets them give themselves a great review in your name. Annoying, but whatever, right? Nope. More than annoying. It could mean that the scammers have created an account in your name, or taken over your account, on online retail sites. Or even created new accounts (maybe lots of them) in other names tied to your address. Letting them post lots of seemingly-real reviews. So keep an eye on your online shopping accounts. If you spot activity that isn’t yours, report it to the site right away, and think about changing your password for that site.

Finally, if you got seeds or anything else in that mail that you didn’t order, you don’t have to pay for it. You also never have to return unordered merchandise.