



International Rules for Seed Testing 2021

Introduction to the ISTA Rules

**Including changes and editorial corrections adopted
at the online Ordinary General Meeting 2020**

Effective from 1 January 2021

Note on the use of the translations

The electronic version of the International Rules for Seed Testing includes the English, French, German and Spanish versions. If there are any questions on interpretation of the ISTA Rules, the English version is the definitive version.

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Preface to the 2021 Edition of the ISTA Rules

Since 2014, the *International Rules for Seed Testing* (ISTA Rules) are primarily available in electronic format only. The ISTA Rules can be downloaded as a complete PDF file or as individual chapters from:

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/ista/rules>.

If required, users of the ISTA Rules can print their own copies. For further information on the ISTA Rules, see:

<http://www.seedtest.org/rules>.

The electronic version includes the English, French, German and Spanish versions of the ISTA Rules. If there are any questions on interpretation of the ISTA Rules, the English version is the definitive version.

Seed health testing methods

Previously, the seed health testing methods were published as a separate Annex to Chapter 7 of the ISTA Rules. They are now available as separate method sheets from the ISTA web site at:

<http://www.seedtest.org/seedhealthmethods>.

Details of changes

The 2021 changes are editorial corrections or Rules changes adopted at the online Ordinary General Meeting held in June 2020. Edits were made in Adobe InDesign by Vanessa Sutcliffe of HeartWood Editorial (www.heartwoodeditorial.co.uk).

The changes in the text content from the previous edition of the ISTA Rules are listed below. They can be displayed with yellow highlight boxes as a 'layer' over the English version within the electronic copy, with comments on what has changed.

For the previous history of amendments to the ISTA Rules, see the Prefaces for 2003 to 2020 on the ISTA website.

Ernest Allen, ISTA Rules Committee Chair

Susan Alvarez, ISTA Rules Committee Vice-Chair

ISTA Secretariat

Changes to the ISTA Rules for 2021

Introduction

I-1: Health and Safety statement added. Statement reviewed and approved by ECOM and Rules Committee.

Chapter 1

1.5.2.2: Result of changes approved in Chapter 2 during OGM16.

1.5.2.2: Clarification that authorities are not required for reporting.

1.5.2.6: Result of proposal submitted to Germination Committee by ISTA Accreditation Department. Clarity in section 5.9 that only percentage germination is reported when germination test is terminated due to predetermined germination level.

1.5.2.17.2, 1.5.2.17.3 and 1.5.2.17.4: Reference for 5.8.2 replaces the current erroneous reference of 5.8.1.

1.5.2.21, 1.5.2.21.2 and 1.5.2.21.3: Result of changes approved in Chapter 19 during OGM18.

Chapter 2

2.8: Result of nomenclature changes to the *ISTA List of Stabilised Plant Names* that have been incorporated into Table 2C. Previous cross references were not removed prior to the printing of the 2020 Rules. Previous cross references will be removed in the 2021 Rules and the last sentence of the current version will be replaced.

Table 2C Part 1: Result of approved nomenclature changes to the *ISTA List of Stabilised Plant Names*.

Chapter 3

3.7: Result of changes approved in Chapter 2 during OGM16.

3.7: Clarification that authorities are not required for reporting.

Table 3A: Deletion of *Poa pratensis* varieties that are no longer being traded. Proposal approved by majority vote in Purity Committee.

Chapter 4

4.2.1: Result of changes approved in Chapter 4 during OGM18.

4.2.2: ‘Orobanchaceae’ replaced with ‘dust-like seeds’ to harmonise with other changes related to such seeds. Addition of ‘indistinguishable species’ to distinguish those seeds that are costly to or not reliably retrieved

in the complete test quantity. Proposal approved by majority vote in Purity Committee.

4.2.4: ‘Orobanchaceae’ replaced with ‘dust-like seeds’ and ‘very expensive seed’ replaced with ‘small seed lots’ to harmonise with other changes related to such seeds. A reduced test is allowed in the Rules for similar species searches. Proposal approved by majority vote in Purity Committee.

Chapter 5

5.2.7.2: Result of validation study carried out in Germination Committee to change evaluation of roots for *Helianthus annuus*, allowing for secondary roots when the primary root is defective. Proposal approved by Germination Committee.

5.6.2.4 and 5.6.3.1: Clarity that LED lights can be used for germination. Proposal supported by Germination Committee.

5.9: Proposal submitted to Germination Committee by ISTA Accreditation Department. Clarity that only percentage germination is reported when germination test is terminated due to predetermined germination level.

Table 5A Part 1: Result of validation study conducted on *Brassica napus* to determine which temperature requirements for germination promoted higher normal seedling development and enhanced testing reproducibility among labs. Proposal supported by Germination Committee.

Chapter 7

Method 7-001a, -001b, -002a, -002b, -003 -005, -006, -008, -010, -011, -012, -013a, -013b, -014, -015 and -016: Increasing harmonisation for sample and subsample size throughout Seed Health Methods. Proposal approved and supported by Seed Health Committee.

Methods 7-001a, -001b, -002a, -002b, -007 and -009: Clarifying instructions for preparing hypochlorite solutions for pretreatment as prescribed in Methods.

Method 7-004, -007, -019a, -019b, -020, -021, -022, -023, -024, -025, -026, -027, -028, -029, -030, -031 and -032: Increasing harmonisation for sample size with other methods to detect fungi. Proposal approved and supported by Seed Health Committee.

Methods 7-005, -006, -008, -014, -016, -022 and -032: Clarifying instructions for preparing hypochlorite solutions for pretreatment as prescribed in Methods. Adding use of hypochlorite solutions for methods

similar to those already approved in Rules. Proposal supported by Seed Health Committee.

Method 7-007: Revision requested by Seed Health Committee to make description of *Alternaria linicola* more informative.

Method 7-019a, -019b and -020: Addition of safety considerations when using ethidium bromide. Proposal supported by Seed Health Committee.

Method 7-019a and -020: Clarity that alternative chemicals other than ethidium bromide may be used for this method. Proposal supported by Seed Health Committee.

Method 7-021, -030 and -031: Clarity that alternative chemicals other than ethidium bromide may be used for this method. Addition of safety considerations when using ethidium bromide. Proposal supported by Seed Health Committee.

Chapter 9

9.2.4.2, 9.2.5.4, 9.2.5.6, 9.3.1.4, 9.3.1.5.1, 9.3.1.5.2, 9.3.1.5.3, 9.3.1.5.4, 9.3.1.5.5, 9.3.2.4.3, 9.3.2.8 and 9.3.2.9: Review of Chapter 9 with recommendation that some wording changed to improve clarity on when a laboratory *must* perform an action and when it is suggested that the laboratory *should* perform the action (but would not be found in violation during an ISTA audit if they used a different but acceptable alternative process). Proposal approved by Moisture Committee.

9.2.4.3: Clarification of definition of appropriate containers for use in oven moisture testing. Review of Chapter 9 by Moisture Committee.

9.2.4.6 and 9.2.5.4: Use of singular 'mesh' instead of misleading 'meshes'. Proposal approved by Moisture Committee.

9.2.5.2: Section re-ordered and modified to improve clarity and to avoid confusion about differences in how many working samples are drawn depending on whether seeds are whole or ground.

Table 9A Part 2: Moisture method for *Carica papaya* included in table. Proposal made following validation studies carried out within Moisture Committee.

Chapter 15

15.8.2.8, 15.8.3.6 and 15.8.4.6: Reference for 5.8.2 replaces the current erroneous reference of 5.8.1.

Table 15B: Clarification of assessment of 2 mm radicle; consistency in description of germination media for radicle emergence test for *Zea mays* and *Triticum aestivum* subsp. *aestivum*; all Latin names expressed according to *ISTA List of Stabilised Plant Names*. Additional text clarifies measurement of 2mm in radicle emergence test for these species and specifies that assessments should be made by eye. All validation for radicle emergence has been done without magnification and has achieved repeatability and reproducibility. Proposal supported by Vigour Committee.

Introduction to the ISTA Rules

I-1 General information

The International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) was established in 1924 to work towards a vision of uniformity in seed testing internationally. ISTA's current mission is to develop, adapt and publish standard procedures for sampling and testing seeds, and to promote uniform application of these procedures for evaluation of seeds moving in international trade. The need for seed testing methods that are reliable and reproducible among its accredited member laboratories is therefore a basic need for ISTA. This is achieved through the publication of the *International Rules for Seed Testing* (hereafter 'ISTA Rules'). The primary aim of the ISTA Rules is to provide testing methods for seeds designated for growing of crops or production of plants. In addition, most of the testing methods can also be applied for evaluation of the quality of seeds used as food or for technical purposes.

ISTA's seed sampling and testing methods have been developed by its members since its formation in 1924. Methods have gone through appropriate validation studies to ensure that test procedures give reliable and reproducible results. Following agreement between ISTA's member countries, the validated methods have been included in the ISTA Rules.

Seed quality testing therefore requires test methods and equipment that have been tested to ensure they are fit for purpose, i.e. validated. The ISTA Method Validation Programme (see section I-2) provides the mechanism for the inclusion of test methods in the ISTA Rules. New methods and modifications to existing methods need to be validated through the ISTA Method Validation Programme. Equipment needs to be fit for the purpose described in each chapter, and not influence the accuracy or reliability of results. Rules proposals can include the use of technologies new to the ISTA Rules, whether these are the basis of new methods or new tools within existing methods, provided they meet these requirements.

Seed is a living biological product, and its behaviour cannot be predicted with the certainty that characterises the testing of inert or non-biological material. The test methods used must be based on scientific knowledge and the accumulated experience of those working in seed testing and quality control. This expertise is provided largely by the members of ISTA's Technical Committees.

The ISTA Rules contain 19 chapters, 17 of which provide internationally accepted test methods for various attributes of seed quality. Chapter 2 (Sampling) provides the required methods for sampling of seed lots, because for ISTA, a direct connection between the seed lot from which the sample was drawn and the results of quality tests conducted on that seed lot must always be evident.

The 'end product' for an accredited ISTA laboratory following quality tests on a seed lot is an ISTA Certificate. Information on how to use ISTA Certificates is presented in Chapter 1.

Each of the 17 chapters on test methods includes sections on the Object (of the test), Definitions (of terms used in the chapter), General Principles (for the test), Apparatus (required for the test), Procedure (how to conduct the test), Calculation and Expression of Results (specific to each test), Reporting Results (how to report results correctly on an ISTA Certificate), and Tolerances (statistical tables for use in determining whether test results are acceptable or not acceptable). Note that where, to provide adequate guidance, it has been necessary in the Apparatus section to refer to a particular manufacturer's piece of equipment, this should not be construed that ISTA endorses that piece of equipment in preference to, or to the exclusion of, equivalent products from other manufacturers.

The ISTA Rules are designed for the principal crop species of the world. Species are broadly classified as agricultural and vegetable, tree and shrub, and flower, spice, herb and medicinal. ISTA encourages proposals for the addition of new species to the ISTA Rules.

ISTA Certificates can only be issued by ISTA accredited laboratories. For seed quality test results to be reported on an ISTA Certificate, it is mandatory that all the requirements of the ISTA Rules are strictly followed.

ISTA also recommends that the ISTA Rules be used by all seed testing laboratories (including non-ISTA member laboratories) when testing seed for trade transactions which do not require the use of an ISTA Certificate (e.g. within a country), and for the enforcement of national laws for the control of seed quality.

Users of the ISTA Rules are responsible to comply with the Health and Safety Requirements for the jurisdiction in which they operate. ISTA does not audit or accept any responsibility for compliance to Health and Safety Regulations. Any statements relating to Health and Safety in the ISTA Rules are for guidance only.

For further information on the ISTA Rules and their use, please contact:

ISTA Secretariat
Zürichstrasse 50
CH-8303 Bassersdorf
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Fax +41 44 838 6001

or visit the ISTA website: www.seedtest.org

I-2 Guidelines for ISTA Rules proposals

Proposals to amend the ISTA Rules or to introduce new species are welcomed from any source. ISTA operates an open system, and proposals are not restricted to ISTA members only. Any external proposal needs to have been submitted to the ISTA Secretariat by 1 November.

Following receipt, the ISTA Secretariat may send the proposal to the relevant ISTA Technical Committee or directly to the ISTA Rules Committee, which will review all the proposals received. The ISTA Executive Committee will then either approve a proposal for consideration by the ISTA membership or request further work on the proposal. All approved Rules proposals are then sent to the ISTA membership two months before the Ordinary Meeting. At the Ordinary Meeting, the ISTA voting delegates may vote to accept a proposal (which will then be implemented in the ISTA Rules, effective 1 January of the following year), to withdraw a proposal (for further consideration), or to reject a proposal.

I-2.1 Proposals concerning test methods

All seed quality test methods proposed for inclusion in the ISTA Rules must have gone through the ISTA Method Validation Programme. This is required for both new test methods (i.e. not currently in the ISTA Rules) and modifications to existing methods already included in the ISTA Rules. A four-step process is involved:

1. method selection and development;
2. validation through comparative testing;
3. review of comparative test results and preparation of a Method Validation Report;
4. approval of validation status by the relevant ISTA Technical Committee and preparation and of an ISTA Rules proposal for the method.

Final acceptance of the proposal by vote of the ISTA membership at an Ordinary Meeting will allow publication of the validated method in the ISTA Rules.

Further information on the ISTA Method Validation Programme can be obtained from the ISTA Secretariat.

I-2.2 Proposals for new species

For a proposal to introduce a new species, Form 1 on pages I-4 to I-6 may be used. The following information must be supplied by the applicant:

1. **Names of species.** The scientific name (including author) plus common names and synonyms must be given. The common names will be used by the ISTA Nomenclature Committee to update the *Multilingual Glossary of Common Plant Names*. The ISTA Nomenclature Committee will stabilise the scientific name for at least six years so that laws and trade agreements do not have to be altered frequently. For assistance in determining the correct scientific name and its author, the ISTA Nomenclature Committee may be contacted.
2. **Maximum lot size and sample sizes.** Proposals for maximum lot size should take into account the general principles that have been applied to species already in the ISTA Rules and to the feasibility of achieving reasonably homogenous seed lots. Seed size is generally the significant factor in determining maximum lot size, but this is also influenced by whether the species is for agriculture or horticulture use, a tree or shrub species, or a flower, spice, herb or medicinal species. This, in turn, will determine whether the species should be placed in Part 1, 2 or 3, respectively, of Table 2C. Proposals for maximum lot size and submitted sample size should then be based on those already to be found in the corresponding part of Table 2C. For agricultural and horticultural species, the submitted sample is larger in relation to the purity working sample, based on the weight of 2500 seeds, than for the other species, to allow for determination of other species by number based on 10 times the purity weight.
3. **Pure Seed Definition.** The ISTA Rules and the *ISTA Handbook on Pure Seed Definitions* already list many pure seed definitions. The appropriate one should be given. If none of them apply, a proposal for a new definition should be submitted.

4. **Validated germination test methods.** The methods proposed must have been validated, either by multi-laboratory collaborative testing or peer validation (see ISTA Method Validation Programme). Advice as to requirements can be obtained from the ISTA Germination Committee. Please specify the data as required for insertion in Table 5A.
5. **Validated tetrazolium test procedures.** Procedures for tetrazolium testing should be given if known. A proposal to amend Chapter 6 may be submitted following the appropriate method validation.
6. **Validated moisture content determination methods.** A validated method for moisture determination must be provided if the method is different to the reference (i.e. low-constant-temperature) method.
7. **Thousand-seed weight**
8. **Varietal identification.** Using current techniques, it is possible to verify a descriptor to check varietal purity in some species. Please indicate validated techniques.
9. **Seed health tests.** The methods proposed must have been validated, either by multi-laboratory collaborative testing or peer validation (see ISTA Method Validation Programme). Advice as to requirements can be obtained from the ISTA Seed Health Committee.

I-2.3 Other proposals

Within a chapter of the ISTA Rules, a change to the existing text (e.g. amendment of a definition) or introduction of new text (e.g. introduction of a new definition) may be proposed. Providing the proposal does not directly involve a test method or new species, it should be sent directly to the ISTA Secretariat.

Thousand-seed weight of small-seeded varieties of *Poa pratensis*

Before a small-seeded variety can be included in Table 3A, a determination of the thousand-seed weight must be performed on at least 20 samples from different seed lots, representing seeds grown either in two different harvest years or in two different countries.

The determination of the thousand-seed weight must be carried out on pure seeds, obtained by blowing a 1 g sample of *Poa pratensis* using the standard blower setting (factor 1.00). Only seed remaining in the heavy fraction may be used for the thousand-seed weight. See Chapter 10 of the ISTA Rules for the weight determination procedure.

Results should be submitted to the ISTA Purity Committee with a request to change the ISTA Rules.

Form 1: Proposal for inclusion of new species in the ISTA Rules

Note: this form is also available on the ISTA website (www.seedtest.org/mv-prog)

1. Scientific name of proposed species

(Family)	Genus	Species	(Nominated Authority)

Genus and species names appear in *ISTA List of Stabilised Plant Names*: Yes/No

Known synonyms: _____

Common plant name: _____ in _____ (Member country)
(required for Multilingual Glossary)

2. Lot and sample weights

(Information as it should appear in Table 2C)

Species	Maximum weight of lot (kg)	Minimum submitted sample (g)	Minimum working samples (g)	
			Purity analysis (3.5.1)	Count of other species (4.5.1)

3. Pure Seed Definition

(Table 3B Part 1)

The following Pure Seed Definition (PSD) covers the proposed species:

Genus	Family	PSD number	Chaffiness

No existing definition covers this species:

Distinguishing characteristics of this species:

(List distinguishing characteristics. Attach drawings, if available, and be prepared to send to the Secretariat five seed samples from well-processed, as well as from incompletely cleaned, seed.)

4. Validated germination test method(s)

(Information as it should appear in Table 5A)

Species	Prescriptions for:				Additional directions incl. recommendations for breaking dormancy
	Substrate	Temperature (°C)	First count (d)	Final count (d)	

5. Validated tetrazolium test procedure

(Information as it should appear in Table 6A)

Species	Pretreatment: type/minimum time (h)	Preparation before staining	Staining solution (%)	Optimum staining time (h)	Preparation for evaluation	Permitted non-viable tissue	Remarks

(If no existing drawings apply, attach if available)

6. Validated moisture test methods

Specify appropriate methods or details for inclusion in Table 9A Part 1 or 2:

Species	Grinding/cutting (9.2.5.4, 9.2.5.5)	High temperature	Drying at high temperature (h)	Predrying requirement (9.2.5.6)	Remarks
(Part 1)					(Not applicable)
(Part 2)		(Not applicable)	(Not applicable)	(Not applicable)	

7. Thousand-seed weight = _____ g

8. Validated varietal identification method (attach separate sheet, if necessary)

Supporting evidence for proposal

9. Number of national seed analysis certificates issued per year:

10. Other countries or laboratories testing the proposed species:

Submitted by:

Signature:

Date: