

Finding Your Way through the Gardening Catalog Maze

Gardening catalog season is upon us!

The oldest plant catalog known is from a Dutch merchant in 1612! It was a catalog of bulbs and other exotic plants. The first record of a seed catalog dates back to 1667 England. American Colonists brought seeds from their native countries, traded with Native Americans or imported seeds from Europe in an effort to grow their own familiar fruits and vegetables. The first US catalog was issued by a fruit tree company in 1771. Most of the early catalogs featured herbs for medicinal uses. Today we enjoy a plethora of printed as well as online sources for plant materials. Where do we begin with this vast amount of information and availability?

Keys to catalog order success:

Find a trustworthy supplier. Check with other online retailers and websites, sites that you trust, for recommendations of catalog order companies. Friends and fellow gardeners may have experiences with mail order companies. The local county extension, run by master gardeners, can also be a source for this information.

Purchase only seeds, bulbs or plants that match the hardiness zone and growing conditions of their new home. Catalog photos are taken by professional photographers, of plants grown in IDEAL circumstances by professionals. Read plant descriptions and information to assure the plant ordered will grow in your garden.

When buying seeds, purchase only what realistically will be planted in the current growing year. Seeds lose most of their viability after the first year. The best germination rate occurs on seeds that are packaged for the current year.

When ordering from a new company, start with a small order. Additional purchases can be made later, after satisfaction with the first order is achieved.

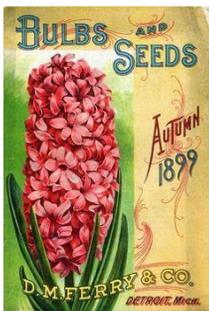
Pay attention to shipping and handling fees. Some companies offer flat rate shipping while others base shipping on the order dollar amount.

Check to see if the company accepts returns/guarantees/warranties for plants damaged in shipping or those that don't meet expectations.

Shop local when possible. Whether purchasing from a local retailer or an online source, plants that are "born and raised" in a closer geographic region, will do better than those that come from across the country.

Catalogs can be a wonderful pick-me-up on a dreary winter's day. There is a vast amount of information in the plant descriptions including; mature size, bloom color and bloomtime, hardiness zone, sunlight and water needs, as well as disease and animal resistance. Frequently, new cultivars are highlighted.

So grab a blanket, a cup of hot tea, and curl up with a good catalog. Spring is coming!



Alaine Bush, Advanced Master Gardener