

Early Spring is Seed Catalog Season!

by Kate Rogers Gessert

At this time of year, I read seed catalogs and dream about summer, and order far more seeds than I can possibly grow in my garden. Every year it happens! I want to make sure that you too have as many garden treasures as possible to choose from, so I'm sharing my favorite catalogs—the ones that I leap on as soon as they appear in the mailbox. Although local gardening stores like Down to Earth and Greys have good selections of seeds, a great many more varieties are generally available from catalogs.

Regional catalogs are an obvious place to look for plants well-adapted to our climate. Many Eugene gardeners already know about Territorial Seeds in nearby Lorane. Two other excellent Northwest companies are Nichols Herb and Rare Seeds in Albany, and Abundant Life Seed Foundation in Port Townsend, Washington.

Nichols has a wide, reasonably-priced selection of herb seeds and plants—9 basil, 8 mint, dwarf sage, pink-flowered rosemary, and a new, leafy strain of coriander are among this year's offerings. Extensive, in-

novative vegetable listings emphasize new Asian and European varieties, diverse ethnic and native American vegetables, and curiosities such as *Orangetti* squash—orange-fleshed spaghetti squash, curly mallow salad greens, and *Habanero* pepper, reputedly 1000 times hotter than *Jalapeno*!

Abundant Life Seeds emphasizes wildflowers and open-pollinated, traditional vegetable varieties, with a long, fascinating book list, and a good grain selection that includes seed amaranth, quinoa, and dry corn varieties.

Raintree Nurseries in Washington State, and Northwoods Nursery north of Portland, publish a joint catalog that is a Northwest fruit grower's best friend. It has sensible information on the plants' growing conditions, pollination requirements, and food and landscape uses. It is filled with tried-and-true Northwest fruit varieties, new experimental varieties for our region, and fruits and nuts that are attractive landscape plants. This year's catalog lists, to name just a few, 10

Asian pears (in addition to all the European ones), leaf-curl-resistant peaches, cranberry, dwarf blueberry, red huckleberry, wintergreen, red seedless grapes, persimmons for the Northwest, hardy and fuzzy kiwis, hardy almond, Chinese and European chestnuts, hickories, rose hips, mulberries, serviceberries, and 15 bamboos! I'm trying to figure out how I can grow all of them on a small city lot.

Catalogs from climates similar to the Pacific Northwest's are also full of exciting possibilities. Thompson

expect the company to be out of a few of your selections, and be sure to check the space on the order form where you can request a free leaflet, *Raising Seeds with T & M*, which has germination instructions for hundreds of species.

Seed catalogs from the cooler northern parts of the northeast U.S. are also full of good ideas for the Northwest. The Wonder Workhorse of my catalog collection is Stokes Seeds in upstate New York. I depend on this catalog year after year for its very extensive vegetable and flower variety listings, its thorough, dependable growing instructions, and its low prices.

I also like Johnny's Seeds in Maine. Emphasizing vegetable varieties that grow well in cool summers, Johnny's does extensive variety trials and introduces many new varieties. I especially like their soybeans. Steamed, unripe soybean seeds are delicious—a bit like sweet, nutty limas—and bear NO resemblance to the heavy starchiness of many dry soybeans. Johnny's has both green and black soybeans for green-shell use; black *Panther* is my favorite.

Catalogs from bioregions unlike our own can still be excellent seed sources. Seeds Blum in Idaho specializes in heirloom seeds: those handed down through generations in families and neighborhoods. The names alone are enough to set a gardener's mind spinning: *Brandywine* and *Purple Calabash* tomatoes, *Snake Eye* eggplant, *Ragged Jack* kale, *Ruby Crescent* and *All Blue* potatoes, *Bloody Butcher* corn, and beans!—*Red Lazy Wife*, *Wren's Egg*, *Turkey Crow*, *Jacob's Cattle*, *Dry Adventist* and *Bumblebee*.

Last summer I visited the Soviet Union. I took along some watermelon seeds from Seeds Blum, seeds that had originally come to America with immigrants from the Ukraine. The watermelon was *Moon and Stars*, which has a dark green rind with small yellow spots, and a large yellow blotch for the moon. When I gave these seeds to Ukrainian gardeners, they got very excited, because *Moon and Stars* is still a commonly grown Ukrainian variety. I had brought the



Dill

seeds home!

Seeds Blum also specializes in colorful vegetables—*Blue Pod* pea, pink and red celery, and purple mustard—edible flowers, and unusual vegetables and herbs such as Chinese yam, rat-tail radish, asparagus pea, and saffron.

One of the ultimate armchair-gardening catalogs is from J.L. Hudson, Seedsman, in California. Seeds of woody and herbaceous plants from temperate and tropical climates throughout the world are all gathered together under one cover. Where else could you find seed of 32 eucalyptus species, 13 rose species, 9 viburnums—mostly edible—and of tamarind, teakwood, Himalayan May apple, wooly blue curls, and sugar stick? Plus ancient Zapotec edibles collected among the "People of the Clouds," who live in the mountains of southern Mexico—the manzana chile tree, pericon (a tarragon-flavored marigold), and chilacayote, a rampaging squash which I can personally testify will overwhelm large territories in a single summer, covering almost anything in its path—trellises, sheds, fences, and small animals who don't move fast enough. Be careful when you order from J.L. Hudson—germination instructions in the catalog are approximate, and unless you can learn how to sprout the seeds from other reliable sources, you may not be able to get them started. But the catalog is a great adventure, even if all you do is read it.

I wish you many happy hours this spring spent dreaming over seed catalogs, and many more hours out in your garden, growing new plants and discovering what they are like, during the long, warm summer that I hope awaits us.

Catalog Addresses and Prices

Abundant Life Seed Foundation
P.O. Box 772
Port Townsend, WA 98368
(\$1 for catalog)

Nichols Herb and Rare Seeds
1190 N. Pacific Highway
Albany, OR 97321
(free catalog)

J.L. Hudson, Seedsman
P.O. Box 1058
Redwood City, CA 94064
(\$1 for catalog)

Johnny's Selected Seeds
Foss Hill Rd.
Albion, ME 04910
(free catalog)

Seeds Blum
Idaho City Stage
Boise, ID 83706
(\$2 catalog)

Stokes Seeds
Box 548
Buffalo, NY 14240
(free catalog)

Territorial Seed Co.
P.O. Box 27
Lorane, OR 97451
(free catalog)

Thompson & Morgan
P.O. Box 1308
Jackson, NJ 08527
(free catalog)

Raintree Nursery &
Northwoods Nursery
391 Butts Rd.
Morton, WA 98356
and 28696 S. Cramer Rd.
Molalla, OR 97038
(free catalog)

and Morgan is a British seed company with a New Jersey branch. Its enormous catalog, illustrated with beautiful color photographs, includes over 4000 species and varieties of common and rare flowers, with a naturally strong emphasis on those that thrive in English gardens—which are the same ones that thrive in Pacific Northwest gardens. There are many species and varieties of flowers that aren't even listed in many of the big American catalogs—flowers such as anagallis, phacelia, godetia, asarina, corydalis, and linaria. There is mind-boggling abundance of some flowers—for example, 39 varieties of sweet pea, and 34 species of campanula. T & M vegetable selections rely heavily on vegetables favored by British gardeners, such as fava beans and scarlet runners, on early-ripening varieties, and on unusual vegetables, such as green-in-snow, bayam, and eng tsai (all Asian greens), *Romanesco* broccoli, which looks like a huge chartreuse pinwheel, and Chinese artichokes. When you order from T & M, you should allow plenty of time,

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