

# Specialty catalogs offer seeds of inspiration



H. S. STEVENS

One of the few things I like about winter is browsing through the new garden catalogs.

They help me forget cold rain and blue northers and let me dream about spring. But that isn't all. These attractive dream books also have a practical side. They open the door to gardening by mail and to the advantages that armchair-shopping provides.

I think all of us would prefer to spend our garden dollars locally, but suppose we are tired of growing the same old pepper varieties that area growers provide? Call for The Pepper Gal catalog at (954) 537-5540, and you can choose from more than 200 pepper varieties.

Or maybe you'd like to try new or different tomatoes. Choose from more than 200 varieties by contacting Tomato Growers Supply Co. at (941) 768-1119 or Totally Tomatoes at (803) 663-0016.

You should still buy most of your garden supplies from area nurserymen and take advantage of their experience and expertise. But if irises are your hobby, call for Cooley's Gardens \$5 catalog at (503) 873-5463. It lists more than 400 varieties of bearded iris and will thrill you with 300 color photos.

If you are interested in native plants and wildflowers, you'll find any kind your heart desires in catalogs from Native American Seed (1-800-728-4043) and Wildseed Farms 1-800-848-0078), both of which are Texas companies.

See what I mean? One of the biggest advantages of gardening by mail is that you can choose from a wider inventory of seeds or plants than you typically find in local nurseries. You will see new varieties of flowers and vegetables in national catalogs long before you can find them in stores.

If you just like to be different and grow unique species for which there is not a big demand, you will also find specialty catalogs helpful. Say you are fascinated with exotic plants. Then you should call Logee's Greenhouses at (860) 774-8038 and request its \$3 catalog or Brudy's Exotics at 1-800-926-7333 for its \$2 catalog. Each lists hundreds of rare and exotic cultivars.

If you are into heirloom varieties, especially those with a history, the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historical Plants will enable you to grow some of the same varieties that the former president grew at Monticello. Call for a \$1 catalog at (804) 984-9816.

Another advantage of gardening by mail is that you can order ahead of time and be sure to receive what you want when you want it. However, here are some tips and cautions to be aware of before placing an order.

- Be sure you can provide the proper growing conditions, indoors or out, for the particular plant you are ordering. If it's an outdoor plant, is it adapted to your climate and soil? Your county extension service office or the Texas Certified Nursery Professional at your garden center can advise you.

- Avoid unfamiliar plants that in a catalog are de-



*A specialty catalog can help you find the perfect pepper.*

scribed as unbelievable, incredible, fantastic, etc. If the plant sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- The catalog should clearly state the size of the plants to be shipped. You don't want surprises when opening the box.

- Are the plants guaranteed? If so, for how long?

- Is the shipping time specified?

- If ordering native plants or seeds, look for the phrase "nursery propagated." If the catalog doesn't specify, ask. Collecting seed or plants in the wild can contribute to the extinction of endangered species.

- Be sure you have the site ready when the plants arrive.

If, because of bad weather or other reasons, you are not able to set out bare-root trees or shrubs as soon as they arrive, open the box, place it out of direct sunshine, and keep the packing material cool and moist. You can hold the plants over for several days in this manner.

When bare-root plants must be held over for longer than a week, dig a V-shape trench deep enough to accommodate the roots, place the plant in the trench at a 45-degree angle and cover the roots with soil. Keep the soil moist but not saturated. The trench should be in a cool, shady area to prevent drying and to keep the buds dormant.