

## Confessions of a Lazy Gardener

### Issue #4: Seed Catalogs

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They're here. The seed catalogs. The promise of summer glory and bountiful harvests. The opportunity to find the new plant that will be the perfect addition to the garden. The hope of having something new that all your friends will covet. The chance to graciously share a new discovery.



Over the years, I've found some "keepers" that always perform for me. Here are some of my favorites:

**Ageratum "Blue Horizon"**. Used to stop traffic in front of my house when it was first on the market. Still a great all-around flower.

~~Jung's Yellow Belle~~ pepper. (*No longer available! Remember, this was written in about 1999.*)

**"Biscayne" pepper**. A cubanelle type that produces a lot of long, green peppers. Turn beautiful orange as they mature.

**"Bulgarian Carrot" pepper**. Hot carrot-shaped pepper that turns bright orange, hence the name. We have grown these two different years but have yet to use them in cooking. (Hot peppers are Phil's bailiwick: I am Norwegian.) Rumor has it that they are very hot.

**Dahlia "Park Princess"**. An old standard, very nice. Big pink cactus flowers on a bushy plant that doesn't need staking. Striking in the landscape.

**Gaura lindheimerei ('Whirling Butterflies')**. Nice lacy flowers in mid- to late summer. Sometimes will winter over, often reseeds. Very popular these days. Seed was hard to get last year.

**Snapdragon "Liberty"**. Not too tall, not too short, nice display. Margaret Hibberd won the FFF Featured Flower award in 1999 with it.

**Salvia coccinea "Coral Nymph"**. Large plant with striking pink flowers. Always in good form for the State Fair Flower Show. (*Getting harder to find again in the 2020's.*)

**Verbena bonariensis**. Getting a little more common around Minnesota, but still striking, with its stiff, angular stems and flowers perfect for butterflies in mid to late summer.

However, as we all know, there is also the chance to acquire the biggest disappointment since "Waterworld" (1995). We might get verbena bonariensis seeds and end up with 0% germination\*. Or ageratum "Red Top" might turn out to be not all that red and pretty spindly to boot. Or chenopodium giganteum, so glowingly depicted in the catalog, might turn out to be a fancy version of (gasp!) Lamb's Quarters. Or dahlia "Fascination" will be shipped so late that it only starts budding in October, and you never see a flower (nice purple foliage, though). Or salvia pratensis hematoides may turn out to be the biggest dud you ever saw, and all your gardening friends will remind you that you gave it to them.

To minimize disappointment, it's important to study seed catalogs carefully. Some observations:

- A Lazy Gardener should avoid anything that is not listed as "Easy" to grow. If it's not easy, it's not going to happen in the Lazy Environment.
- It's chancy to select anything that requires "evenly moist" conditions, unless you live next to a swamp. Lazy Gardeners are not known for their assiduous watering habits during dry spells.
- Don't believe the color photographs. If it looks too good to be true, it's probably been touched up.
- Pay attention to hardiness zones. What makes you think that you can keep Zone 6 plants alive over the winter? Isn't there a fairly long list of Zone 4 plants that haven't made it in your garden?
- Don't even think about an item that even the catalog admits are susceptible to disease or pests. The Lazy Gardeners know full well that insects and plant diseases will be much more persistent about survival than the Gardeners will be about eradication.
- Think twice about purchasing annuals at \$4 per plant. Yes, that Hibiscus 'Red Shield' looks great at Norenberg Gardens, but is it really worth Four (1999) Dollars? Plus Shipping and Handling? Will it grow from cuttings? Can you mooch one off any of your Not Lazy friends who carefully nurtured cuttings through the winter?

Now, will all these cautions stop us from avidly searching Thompson & Morgan, Burpee, Parks, Stokes, Shepherds, Whiteflower Farm, Wayside, Savory's, ~~Ambergate, Shady Oaks~~, etc. etc. for the next Great Cool Thing? Probably not. The best we can hope for is a few great finds and the fortitude to get rid of the next *salvia pratensis hematoides* that we couldn't resist ordering.

\* *Verbena bonariensis* seem to be hard to get started under lights, but self-seed enthusiastically outside. Let me know if you need any! They start coming up around Memorial Day.