

# Now is the time to study garden catalogs

By Marge Alpen  
special writer

When viewed positively, one could say that the Michigan winter provides the gardener with the opportunity to reflect on last summer's garden, to enjoy a new garden book and to dream about next summer's garden while perusing the many catalogs that arrive daily.

My choice for winter reading is "Home Grounds — A Gardener's Miscellany" by Allan Lacy, a regular writer in the Wall Street Journal.

As a source of information on gardening, the Wall Street Journal is hardly a typical garden source. Lacy's book, which I enjoyed, is a collection of articles that have appeared in the Wall Street Journal. It is well written and, surprisingly, uses a rather "down-home" style.

As for the catalogs of 1986, the paper is slicker, the photographs more beautiful and the printed material is more informative and accurate. Invariably, I come across some variety with which I am not familiar.

THROUGH THE years, when I need to identify or learn more about a plant that is new to me, I pick up the old standby Donald Wyman's "Gardening Encyclopedia." It rarely disappoints me. "The Good Housekeeping Illustrated Encyclopedia of Gardening" in 16 volumes is another reference I find useful in checking unknown species and also for more detailed cultural information.

Search for the unusual or the new is a characteristic of most serious gardeners. To satisfy this penchant, our local growers offer a much wider selection of new cultivars than they did even five years ago, so one is less inclined to buy from the catalogs.

Of course, buying locally has many advantages over mail ordering. First, the shipping costs, which can be up to 25 percent of the order are saved. Also mail order involves purchasing plants sight unseen. The actual plant may be quite disappointing.

GENERALLY, I have found mail order plants neither as large nor as well established as locally grown ones. Frequently they are too young, sometimes

## greenhouse gardening

rather puny and unable to withstand the trip and the transplanting.

However, if notified promptly, mail order companies, both large and small, and almost without exception, are happy to replace unsatisfactory merchandise. But the inconvenience of complaining and returning the merchandise is another deterrent to catalog shopping.

Recognizing all of the problems involved in mail order purchases, there were nevertheless a few plants I couldn't resist. Let me tell you about my choices from the 1986 catalogs.

THE CATALOG sent by Thompson & Morgan Seed Co. always tempts me, as it lists many unusual and new annuals and perennials. This year I chose cosmos "Sea Shell."

This variety is described in glowing terms as a pink cosmos whose "petals form fluted shells surrounding the yellow button center." It looks very different from the familiar pink cosmos "Sensation" with its large flat petals.

Cosmos is one of the easiest annuals to grow from seed sown directly in the garden. I'm sure "Sea Shell" will blend well with the many seedlings of "Sensation" which year after year, come up as "volunteers" throughout the garden.

Last year Golden-Walsh in Pontiac featured seedlings of another new and beautiful cosmos call "Candy Stripe," which I grew. This pink and white striped flower was outstanding and the plants blossomed somewhat earlier than "Sensation." The seeds of "Candy Stripe" are offered by Thompson & Morgan Seed Co. and seedlings will probably be available again at Golden-Walsh.

PROBABLY NO flower photographs more beautifully than the rose, and the catalogs from the rose companies are certainly among the most appealing.

However, I'm happy to just look at the pictures. Before purchasing new ones, I prefer to wait and see if any of

my old roses are killed by the winter weather. Actually, since I learned to protect the base of each shrub with a six to eight inch mound of soil, I rarely lose a rose bush.

In December, after the ground is frozen about two inches, I heap up the generous piles of dirt. Although I have tried other kinds of protection against our severe winter weather, none seem as "insulating" as garden soil.

I must admit that this year I did buy a new rose. While thumbing through Lamb's Nursery Catalog, I came across a climbing rose, Cecil Brunner, which I hope will quickly cover an old fence in the rear of my yard.

HAVING for many years grown and enjoyed the old-time, Cecil Brunner, a polyanthus rose, I was pleased to locate the same plant in a climbing form. The catalog says that it will produce 12-15 foot slender stems and the same charming delicate pink blossoms as the more familiar polyanthus form.

I thoroughly enjoy every aspect of growing dahlias. They guarantee color in the garden after many of the annuals

have peaked and they lend themselves to easy, stunning floral arrangements.

I don't even mind the amount of extra care that dahlias require. In fact, I rather enjoy staking and tying the large stalks, lifting the tubers each fall, storing and then starting the tubers again in the spring.

Each year I add one new dahlia to a growing collection. This year I chose one from Spring Hill Nursery.

"EVELINE" is an exquisite formal dahlia, which is described as having a four to five-inch white blossom with a tinge of delicate pink on the tips of the petals. I much prefer plants that produce this medium size flower. They seem to be more floriferous than those that produce the dinner plate size flowers and the smaller blooms are more graceful in floral arrangements.

So many garden flowers are in round or daisy form that in planning a garden or an arrangement for the house, one tries to include upright spikes of such plants as delphinium or snapdragons for punctuation. Contrast in shape is as important a factor in good design as is the combination of colors.

Delphinium and snapdragon are well known to most gardeners. Liatris, perhaps less well known, is equally desirable as a spike accent. It is one of the longest lasting flowers both in the garden and in floral arrangements.

Liatris generally is seen in a rose-purple shade and the color can be rather dull looking. Yet, the white counterpart, "White Spire," which is rarely seen, makes a tall, stunning garden accent.

TWO OR three planted together are impressive, and since I'm always looking for strong white flowers to relieve the intense color of so many of the summer blooming ones, I have ordered "White Spire" Liatris from Lamb's Nursery.

Thriving in a shade garden, the exot-

ic tricyrtis (Toad Lily) brings welcome bloom to the early fall garden. This charming, oriental specimen is one of the many unusual plants carried by Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery.

Thompson & Morgan Seed Co., P. O. Box 1308, Jackson, New Jersey 08527; Lamb's Nursery, East 101 Sharp Avenue, Spokane, Washington 99202; Spring Hill Nursery, 110 West Elm Street, Tipp City, Ohio 45371; and Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery, 2825 Cummings Road, Medford, Oregon 97501.



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The Schoolcraft College Music Department will present its 13th annual Piano Honors Recital Sunday, March 31.

The recital will begin at 4 p.m. in the theater of the college's Liberal Arts Building, 18600 Haggerty Road, be-

tween Six and Seven Mile roads in Livonia.

Approximately 100 of the most talented pianists in the Detroit area competed for a place in the recital. The purpose of the event is to honor pianists, ages 6 to 18, who won competition held March 22 and 23.



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