



BROWSING THROUGH THE CATALOGUES ...

January is a great time for a little armchair gardening. You will find a much larger and more intriguing choice in catalogues than exists in nurseries and garden centres. The seed merchants are always striving to produce new and exciting varieties, quite apart from keeping up with old favourites – the tried and tested golden oldies. You can search and order online or request a free catalogue.

Many of the best and most reliable varieties are household names that our grandparents would have recognized and enjoyed growing. '*Little Gem*' *Lettuce* (1880), *carrot 'Autumn King'* (1900), *cabbage 'January King'* (1867), as well as the aptly named and unfailingly brilliant little 19th century tomato, '*Gardener's Delight*', never fail to do well. If you are looking for good looks, try the blue leek '*Bleu Solaise*' and the beautiful runner bean '*Painted Lady*'. It was originally brought over from Mexico as an ornamental plant.

Should you find any problem with pests and disease look out for disease resistant varieties.

A new trend is the 'patio' vegetable. These are high yielding miniature versions ideal for small plots, balconies and containers. Thompson and Morgan offer *mini-finger carrots* and *climbing courgettes* to save space as they can be trained to grow vertically; the *dwarf runner bean* 'Hestia'; the *tumbling tomato* ideal for hanging baskets, 'Gartenpole', and *mini sweetcorn*.

To save time and effort, you can also order small 'plug plants' ready to grow on. Ordered ahead of time, they will be delivered at the optimum moment ready for planting. Generally, they grow on extremely well without hiccups. They send a manageable amount – enough for you and a couple of friends to share. Another good wheeze is the 'collections'. Kings Seeds do a *cauliflower colour collection* of 'Green Trevi' and 'Violet Queen' which is a visual sensation – a true symphony in lime and violet. There is also a jolly *Courgette Collection* with round and long, yellow and green varieties. Anyone who likes spicy food might be interested in the *Pepper Collection*. It has both *sweet peppers* and chilli scorchers like the *Jalapeno*. If you get too many, you can always share and exchange with your neighbours.

Several suppliers have come up with collections of *easy growers* for children. Go Grow have a starter pack of cottage garden flowers and fun vegetables. It contains red sunflowers, a pumpkin, courgettes, carrots, trailing nasturtiums and tomatoes for £6.99 – quite tempting for grown-ups too.

While some merchants specialize in organic seed, most of the big companies also carry an organic range. Suttons Seeds, for example, has the *Alan Titchmarsh Organic Collection*.

One thing to look out for is the *Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit*. You will see the logo of a prize cup on packets of seed. Plants that have the RHS AGM have been rigorously trialled, and are pretty much guaranteed to perform brilliantly and to be widely available.

You can get a full list from <http://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/documents/AGM2007Veg.pdf>.

THE GOLDEN RULE

ONLY BUY WHAT YOU LIKE TO EAT AND ONLY SOW AS MUCH AS YOU AND YOUR FAMILY WILL REALISTICALLY ENJOY.

Some suppliers

Organic suppliers

Chase Organics (seed merchants for Garden Organic). <http://www.chaseorganics.co.uk/>.

Phone: 01932 253666

Suffolk Herbs. <http://www.suffolkherbs.com/>. Phone: 01376 572456

Tamar Organics. <http://www.tamarorganics.co.uk/>. Phone 01579 371087

Large merchants with organic stock

Thompson and Morgan. <http://seeds.thompson-morgan.com/uk/en/list/patio-vegetables>. Phone 01473 688 821

Kings Seeds. <http://www.kingsseeds.com>. Phone: 01376 571189

Go Grow. <http://www.gogrow.co.uk/products/childrens-seed-collection.php>. Phone: 01507 603079

Dobies Seeds. <http://www.dobies.co.uk/>. Phone: 0844 701 7625

Suttons Seeds. <http://www.suttons.co.uk/>. Phone: 0844 922 0606

Mouth watering range of Italian vegetables.

Seeds of Italy. <http://www.seedsofitaly.com/>. Phone 020 8427 5020

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