

## Catalogues offer a wealth of info!

Hide your credit cards; it's that time of year! The garden catalogues are starting to arrive. No one who's been bitten by the gardening bug can resist plant and seed catalogues. And once you start looking, you can't stop yourself from making a "must have" list. The next thing you know, you're mailing an order form.

Garden catalogues offer new ideas, plant combinations, garden accessories, and of course, plants and seeds. What better way to spend a winter day than deciding which plants should fill your planters, or deliberating over what shrub should be added to the border to bring colour in July. Catalogues have colour pictures, descriptions of growth habits such as dimensions and bloom-time, and maintenance and cultural requirements – in other words, they make a great reference for garden planning. Cross-reference with another source to be certain, but for the most part, reputable mail-order nurseries provide reliable information.

Whether your interest lies in vegetables, herbs, annuals, perennials, shrubs, alpiners, aquatics, bulbs – you get the picture, anything that grows – there is a garden catalogue that specializes in that group. Specialty catalogues will offer more varieties of plants with-



in your area of interest than a general nursery. For instance, a heritage plants and seeds catalogue will offer plants that you remember from your childhood but can't find in the local garden centre.

Most nurseries offer their catalogue both online and in print. Some charge for their print catalogue; browsing online is a cost-free way to catch a glimpse of as many different product offerings as possible.

When comparison shopping be careful to compare the same size plant. There can be a big difference in pricing for a 9-cm pot versus a 3-litre pot. While ultimately it is the same plant, you may have to wait years for the smaller one to mature. Avoid catalogue offers that sound too good to be true – such as hundreds of bulbs for a very low price. These tend to be immature bulbs that may not flower for a few years. Also, bare rootstock may be less expensive but can be tricky for the novice gardener.

Should you not want to incur shipping expenses or if you prefer to

shop at a local supplier, the garden catalogues still allow you to research and plan before your spring trip to the nursery. Take your "wish list" to your local nursery for their suggestions – they may even special order something that is not part of their regular stock.

If you're not on any catalogue mailing lists but would like to be, check out the advertisements in many gardening magazines for suppliers offering catalogues. Just remember, zone differences, shipping and customs clearance need to be kept in mind for foreign suppliers. A good catalogue list can be found on the web-site:

<http://www.canadiangardening.com/how-to/gardening-resources/browse-for-seed-catalogues/a/2493>

Garden catalogues have been referred to as 'pornography' for gardeners – an apt description when you consider that we gardeners get very excited when they arrive in the mail and we sometimes have to hide them from our spouses.

### Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 3, Number 1
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- [trowel\\_talk\\_editor@rogers.com](mailto:trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com)



## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

### Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

#### ONGOING:

**Telephone Help Line:** 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm (all year)

**E-mail Help Line:** [mgoc\\_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

#### CLINICS:

**No advice clinics until Spring 2012**

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**The Edible Landscape: Dessert Course – Small Fruit Trees for You and Me –**  
January 19, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean, Ontario

Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Tips, Tricks and Techniques –** February 20, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Russell Legion/Lion's Den, Russell, Ontario

Hosted by the Russell Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Attracting Birds to your Garden –** February 28, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

David Hinks, Master Gardener

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario

Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: [speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca](mailto:speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca)

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

### January TO DO List

- Check your stored bulbs and tubers to make sure the peat moss they are stored in is still slightly moist but there is no sign of mold.
- Seeds are available in the garden centres now, shop early for a good selection.
- Read seed packages carefully or research germination techniques on-line. Some seeds require special treatment and need to be started early.
- Check houseplants for bugs every time you water. Put any infested plants in quarantine and start a spraying regime with insecticidal soap every 7-10 days.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

### Tip of the Month:

#### Starting seeds

Refer back to our [February 2010](#) issue for some seed starting basics.

Fungicides, such as 'Damp Off', are now banned in Ontario so keeping fungal diseases at bay in germination trays has become a little trickier.

- Make sure the soil-less mix is moist but not damp.
- Use a small fan to keep air circulating around the seed trays.



*Seedlings affected by damping off*

- Some people avoid using peat based mixes as the moisture retaining properties of peat can cause many fungal problems. Coir (coconut fibre) has been suggested as an alternative by

some growers. Others swear by a mix of sand, real soil (sterilized to kill weed seeds) and a small amount of peat moss.

- Cinamon sprinkled on the top of seed trays has been shown to be an effective fungicide.

Providing adequate light for seedlings can also be a challenge during our short winter days.

- Seedlings should be grown under lights. The number of "foot candles" produced by an artificial source are much less than that of the sun so make sure you set a timer on your lights so that the plants get about 14 hours of light each day.
- It is not necessary to use "broad spectrum plant lights" – regular fluorescent lights work also. But it may be beneficial to use one warm light and one cool light in a two bulb fixture.



*A home-made grow-light stand*

- Keep the plants as close as possible to the light bulb – an inch or two is a good distance. Adjustable height light fixtures or blocks under the seed trays to move them closer to the lights, allow you to regulate the distance between the lights and the seedlings. Seedlings reach for the light and will get tall, spindly and scraggly-looking if they are too far away from the light source.