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New year brings a fresh crop of gardening catalogs

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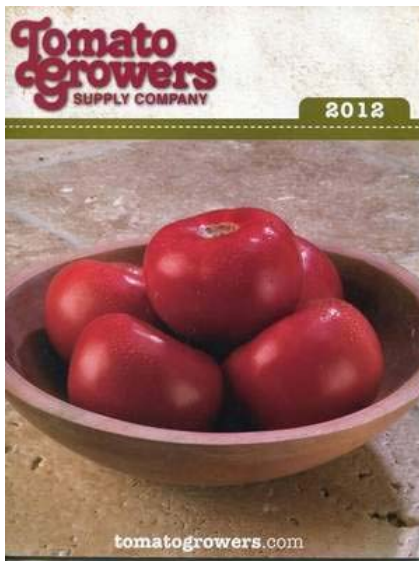
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Garden catalogs are more than pages and pages of pretty pictures for casual enjoyment.

They inspire you to improve or reinvent your yard. They describe each plant down to the number of petals on the flowers or how the leaves are arranged on stems. They also introduce you to the latest and greatest in plant development, whether it's a new color in a coneflower or a bigger and better tomato.

For 2012, Burpee's catalog introduces its Boost Collection of six nutrient-rich vegetables designed exclusively for home gardens.

All were naturally bred by traditional hybridization, with no genetically modified organisms, or unwanted GMOs, according to

a Burpee spokeswoman.

Burpee claims its Boost veggies provide higher levels of disease-fighting antioxidants. For example, a half cup of Cherry Punch tomatoes delivers 90 percent of the recommended daily dose of Vitamin C, and Sweet Heat peppers produce 65 percent more Vitamin C than the average garden pepper. Its Healing Hands salad mix with four greens — mustards, radicchio and lettuce — can be harvested every three weeks for several salads. Home gardeners can purchase Boost via the print catalog or online at Burpee.com.

Here are five more catalogs, all free, worth getting because they offer a wide selection of growing material for Zones 3-10 and they do double duty as educational material:



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Tomato Growers catalog is all about tomatoes. New varieties include Green Doctors and their cherry-sized green fruit and cherry cascade hybrid with cascading clusters of red cherry tomatoes. / HANDOUT/MCT

Written by KATHY VAN MULLEKOM McClatchy Newspapers

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5 Ordering Tips

Choose hardy plants. Select plants suitable for your climate, not just because they look pretty in pictures, especially when it comes to perennials, shrubs and trees that you want to keep around for a long time. Catalogs and online sites usually provide cold-hardy zones for each species; if you don't know your zone, look for a map that illustrates the different zones or contact your extension office. Also, make sure the plant is suitable for the site in your yard, such as sun or shade, wet or dry. Read catalogs carefully for plant descriptions and tips that help you make good choices.

Select suitable seeds. Read descriptions carefully and pick varieties that will yield the best results, especially if you live where there is a shorter growing season for summer flowers, vegetables and fruits. Also, look for disease-resistant varieties.

More

with dark purple veins and leaves that face upward and fill with water when it rains; they stand on sturdy stems in full sun or partial shade and are rated cold hardy to Zone 6.

Page [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [Next](#)

Brent and Becky's Bulbs

Always known for spectacular spring- and summer-flowering bulbs, Brent and Becky Heath have added a few perennials to their summer catalog. This year, Becky recommends a Veronica called Royal Candles with royal blue spikes that look showy in the full-sun summer border; it grows 10 to 15 inches tall and is cold hardy Zones 4-9.

The catalog also includes a couple new Colocasias, or elephant ears, that add a touch of the tropics to your warm-weather gardens no matter where you live. They grow in the ground or look stunning in large pots on your patio or porch. One of the new ones is Bikini-Tini with bluish gray leaves

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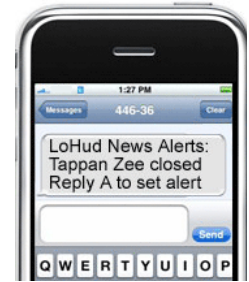
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