



Seed catalogs give root to plans for the next growing season

The garden and seed catalogs that are showing up in mailboxes provide a post-holiday pick-me-up.

That means it's time to get out the notebooks and start planning — and dreaming.

The catalogs provide an actual source of materials for those DIYers who sow their own seeds.

If you prefer the actual plants, the catalogs are an excellent resource for planning your spring garden, and the companies will send you the plants when they are OK to put in the ground in your region.

This year brings several new varieties of flowers and vegetables, such as a collection of vegetables with extra nutrients and luscious, bright yellow sunflowers with chocolate centers that bloom during those dog days of summer.

Here's a look at what's hot for the season ahead:

Fortified vegetables. W. Atlee Burpee and Co. CEO George Ball says the company developed the new line of high-nutrient

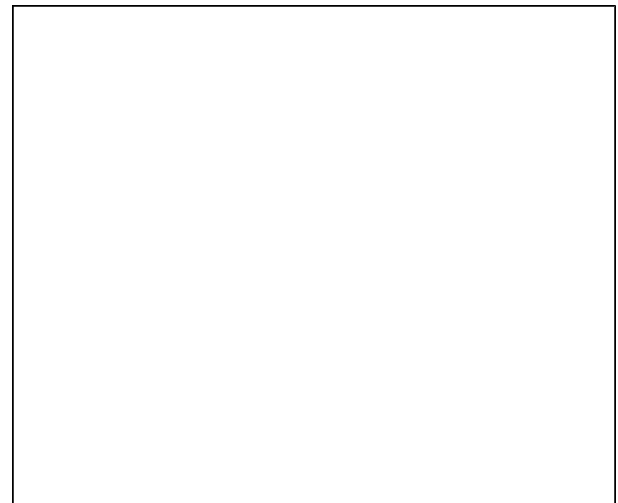
vegetables, called Boost, because of consumer requests. The hybrid plants provide about twice the level of antioxidants as other vegetables.

Included in the collection:

- » Cherry Punch tomatoes with more vitamin C and lycopene than the average garden tomato.
- » Power Pops tomatoes with more lycopene. They are excellent for container gardens.
- » Solar Power tomatoes with three times the level of beta-carotene.
- » Sweet Heat peppers with more vitamin C.
- » Gold Standard cucumbers with more beta-carotene.
- » The Healing Hands salad mix with more lutein and beta-carotene.

While these new vegetables are exclusive to

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Burpee, other seed companies have high-nutrient vegetables as well. Baby boomers, Ball says, are interested in gardening and eating healthier.

The Italian influence. Rochester-based Harris Seeds has new vegetables to offer the home gourmet as well. The Red Torpedo Onion Transplants are Italian cooking onions that gardeners do not have to start from seed; they will arrive at your door when it's time to transplant to your garden. These elongated red onions give an Italian flavor and aroma to pasta, meat and vegetable dishes, Harris says.

To complement your onions and tomatoes, the Caesar Basil from Harris produces large, aromatic, sweet leaves on tall 12 to 18 inch plants.

Melon mania. Harris is reaching into Rochester's history with the Solstice Melon. The muskmelon — developed by Irondequoit farmer William Sutton and improved by local seedsman James Vick — was lauded in the early 20th century as the juiciest, sweetest melon. However, it rotted easily, and in the 1930s and '40s fell victim to a soil infestation called fusarium wilt.

The Solstice, Harris says, is larger and equipped to fight off garden diseases.

The Comstock's Seed Guide also includes some interesting-looking melons. The Queen Anne's Pocket Melons have deep orange stripes with small fruits grown for their fragrance. New this year is the Hero

of Lockinge, a small, round melon with white flesh that is extremely sweet.

Flower power. If you're a flower lover, you know you can't go wrong with petunias for container gardening and in those sun spots. The Shock Wave Coral Crush petunias from Harris are packed with scads of soft coral-rose flowers, all with a yellow throat.

Also for those sunny patches are Solar Chocolate Gold sunflowers from Harris, a dwarf-flowering variety with golden yellow petals surrounding a rich chocolate-hued core. It boasts an excellent flowering life thanks to its pollen-free habit and uniform plant type.

For shade and part-shade, the Fuseables Under the Suns combines two coleus varieties that produce a more natural looking mixed container. Multiple seeds of Crimson Gold and Versa Lime are blended together into one pellet.

Something different. New from High

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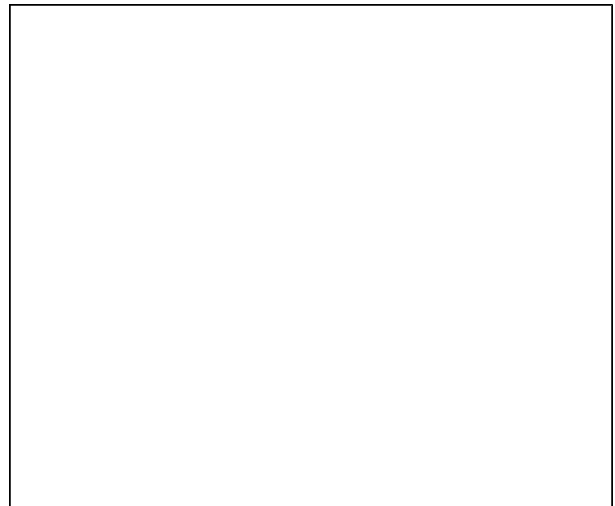


Country Gardens this year are several varieties of Campsis, or American Trumpet Vine, that work great for attracting hummingbirds. If you like the look of trumpet plants, High Country dedicates a page filled with them, such as a new Gelsemium with bright yellow flowers.

For something a little different in your garden, Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds offers the new Azuerus Blue, a delicate-looking sweet-pea flower on a semi-trailing bush. There are also several other interesting looking sweet pea plants, such as the Chocolate Streamer with chocolate colored speckled blossoms that are unusual.

Baker Creek offers a section of Asian vegetables, including a recipe for Bok Choy steam buns. There's Canton Bok, a bok choy with white stems and deep dark leaves, as well as Gailan, or Chinese Kale.

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