

## PLANNING FOR PLANTING WITH SEED CATALOGS

A great way to learn about different types of plants and seeds is to spend a snowy winter day browsing through colorful and enticing seed catalogs. Many offer not only seeds but also bulbs or bare root seedlings to help you get started. To ensure a pollinator friendly garden, choose catalogs that offer non-GMO and neonicotinoid free seeds. Here are some helpful tips.

**Layout:** Catalogs may be organized alphabetically by plant type or by their required growing conditions. Some provide pre-planned garden layouts with actual plant suggestions. Take time to familiarize yourself with different catalog sections.

**Symbols:** Most seed catalogs will provide a legend identifying desired soil conditions, germination method, days to maturity, sun requirement, height, bloom time, growing zone, spacing, benefits and attractions, deer resistance and whether or not the plant will be delivered as a seed, bulb, rhizome or taproot.

**Plant name:** Both the botanical and the common name are provided. Common names can vary by region, so carefully review the description and the photos.

**Descriptions:** Thoroughly read the descriptions to ensure that you are selecting the right plants for your garden. You can learn a lot from well written descriptions.

**Pictures:** Photos are helpful in identifying different varieties and getting a sense of what the plants will look like when fully grown.

**Prices:** Pricing of the plants can vary widely. Compare unit prices between different catalogs to make sure you are getting the best bargain. Carefully review the quantity provided in the packet.

**Shipping costs and schedule:** Factor shipping costs into your decision-making process. Some catalogs entice you with a low seed or plant cost but have high shipping costs. Time your order to assure that you receive your seeds during the proper planting time for your Growing Zone (see below).

**Shop with a friend:** Gardeners love to share. This would be a great opportunity to order a new vegetable or flower with friends and reduce your costs. Avoid having 200 tomato plants when you can only handle five.

### What Seeds to Buy and Plant

**Vegetables:** Some vegetable seeds can be started indoors with grow lights a few weeks prior to being planted outside. But carrots, lettuce, beets and turnips don't like to be transplanted, so plant their seeds directly into the ground after the danger of frost has passed.

**Native Plants:** To provide a bio-diverse environment to support beneficial insects and pollinators, growing a perennial garden filled with native plants is best. Seeds from native plants need to be exposed to a cold, wet winter in order to germinate. Seeds with hard shells need to be broken down a bit with a file or sandpaper before they will germinate. Cardinal flowers, columbine, beebalm, black-eyed Susan, and milkweed are just a few of many native species available.

**Flowers:** Growing flowers from seeds is a very economical and fun way to add many months of color and enjoyment to your yard. Many seeds can be started in pots or trays a few weeks before our last frost. Zinnias, marigolds or cosmos can be directly sowed in prepared soil.

Newtown is in the new USDA Growing Zone 6b with the last frost date occurring May 11-May 20. Seedlings and tender plants will require protection from the sun and torrential rain and need to be re-potted as they grow. Plan now and imagine summer when a rainbow of flowers and vegetables will draw bees and colorful butterflies to your garden. Savor the journey.

