

Growing Points

*Gardening Ideas from Colorado Master
Gardeners*

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Decoding Garden Catalogs for Colorado Gardeners

Cheryl Conklin, Colorado Master Gardener

Maybe you're new to gardening. Or maybe you're recently hooked and looking for something new and exciting. You've found intriguing catalogs in magazines or on the Internet and sent away for them. The breathtaking possibilities arrive wrapped in glossy covers as winter yawns before you. How will you ever choose what's right for your soil (not to mention your space, your sunlight, your ability to care, your time-line, your budget)?

Your most important task has nothing to do with deciphering descriptions meant as much to coax your wallet from your pocket as to educate you. No, intrepid treasure hunter, your first order of business is to learn all you can about the place your garden will grow.

Here are some of the broad strokes: Generally El Paso County falls within USDA hardiness zone 5. The soils might be well-drained or dense with clay, but most of them will be naturally dry, alkaline, and lacking organic matter. The average growing season is 100-115 days. Nights with temperatures above 50 degrees (needed for fruit set on some plants like tomatoes) might start sometime in June and fade away in August or September. Winds are frequent and dry. Sunlight is more intense here than at lower elevations. And because of the widely varying terrain, growing conditions differ from site to site.



That said, if you're still game, then follow me into the maze.

The hardiness zone mentioned in most plant descriptions, refers to the coldest winter temperature a plant is likely to survive. Plants rated hardy to zone 5 usually live through temperatures as low as -20 degrees. Smaller numbered zones refer to areas with colder winter temperatures. That usually means gardeners hunting for plants to survive our winters will want varieties hardy in zones 5 and lower. As with most gardening issues in El Paso

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County, there are caveats, however. The lack of season-long snow cover hereabouts combined with little winter moisture and the presence of drying winds also affects hardiness. Some plants, traditionally hardy to zone 5 don't handle these winter conditions and must be given coats of mulch and periodic soakings to survive.

So, how can you tell from a catalog description whether the plant of your dreams has what it takes to survive next winter? Well, there are no guarantees. However, other clues can give some assurance. Look for cultivation needs that match your garden's attributes. The more the merrier. Failing that, look for words like "reliable", "pest and/or disease resistant", and cultivation needs you're willing and able to supply.

Many catalogs will let you know what type of soil a plant requires. The phrases to look for might read something like "thrives in clay (or sand, depending on what you've got)", "will tolerate alkaline soils", and/or "tolerates poor soils". These phrases describe the existing conditions in most Colorado gardens and should support successful plant choices. Unfortunately, the phrase "moist well-draining soil" most commonly describes the favorite root habitat of popular perennial favorites. If these are the selections that have won your heart, then be prepared to amend the soil, provide ample mulch, and get out your hose.

The exposure or amount of sunlight a plant requires is also often mentioned in catalogs. The most common descriptors are full sun, light shade, and shade. These light conditions translate a little differently at high altitudes in semi-arid climes. A plant requiring full sun often does well in our neck of the foothills and prairie with as little as 4 hours or more of direct sunlight a day. There are actually quite a few plants associated with "full sun" that benefit from shady relief, especially in the heat of mid-afternoon. A few plants requiring full sun elsewhere will even do best in light shade. Look for phrases like "tolerates light shade". Light shade can be found under trees with open canopies (such as a well-pruned locust) or in places where direct sunlight falls up to 4 hours a day. Shade-loving plants, may or may not tolerate direct exposure to the intense Colorado sunlight. If you're willing to experiment, try some in light shade and be prepared to move them to deeper shade provided by buildings, fences, large stones, or evergreens if their leaves burn.

Growing season, of particular importance for fruits, vegetables, and annuals, usually refers to frost free days. Colorado Springs enjoys as many frost free days as the town in Iowa where I grew up, and yet the "growing season" here is quite different. Lack of reliable rainfall, hard rains, hail, dry wind, low humidity, and vast hours of brilliant sun combine to create a harsh growing season, varying widely from year to year. Not knowing ahead of time what any year will bring, the wise gardener might want to prepare for several contingencies.

Seed catalogs that give information beyond "days to maturity" are likely to give you the best clues for success. Look for information such as "thrives in heat", "does best in cool summers", "sets fruit early", and "bolt resistant". Although, especially in recent summers, temperatures climb into the nineties and triple digits, historically this happens only for brief periods in mid summer. Most importantly, even on hot days, night time temperatures often tumble down towards 60 or even 50 degrees. This may adversely affect the plant that "thrives in heat" or sets fruit on warm nights.

Soil temperatures are also affected by the particulars of our climate. The seed catalog or seed packet that informs you of the temperature needed for germination is very useful. Careful monitoring of the current growing season will then help determine when to sow.*Continued on page 8*

Pesticide Cancellations

Jerry Prisk, El Paso County Plant & Pest Technician

In an on-going effort to reduce the risks to children from pesticides in home environments, the EPA has cancelled almost all uses of two commonly sold insecticides, DURSBAN and DIAZINON.

For DURSBAN, manufacturing ended in December, 2000, and distribution and sales ended in December 2002. The last remaining use, a termiticide, ended in December 2004.

For DIAZINON, manufacturing ended in June of 2003, and all sales and distribution ended in August of that year. All retail sales of DIAZINON ended on December 31, 2004.

The consumer, or end user, can use up any existing product according to the label directions.

Permethrin products can largely replace these two cancelled pesticides for general insect control.

Book Review - "A Taste for Gardening"

Nadine Salmons, Colorado Master Gardener

What a wonderful informative and tasty book. No, not the book itself, but the recipes in it.

"A Taste for Gardening" - a general harvest of garden wisdom, a gathering of garden-inspired recipes, tips, essays, poems, art, and sage advice - put together by the Manitou Springs Garden Club is exactly what the compilers said it would be.

Rarely do I review books that I have read cover to cover. This book held my interest all the way to the end. The recipes are simple and at times exclusive [Briarhurst Manor Estate.] The gardening tips are wonderfully accurate. The essays and poems are well placed. The art is simple but well drawn.

In addition to the above, there are garden records with space for your own notes, to-do lists for each season, an annotated list of favorite books and one of favorite films, a page of miscellany to include high altitude canning information, a resource list of "green" businesses that support the club, and, of course, an index to find everything.

Some of the articles that particularly interested me were tips on arranging flowers in a vase, a recipe for a hummingbird garden, and a recipe for a butterfly garden.

This is a hundred and fifty- page book of multiple uses. I would highly recommend it to anyone, including those with more than a beginning knowledge of gardening.

Tree Stump Removal

Ed Carley, Colorado Master Gardener

Trees may need to be removed due to disease or insect damage, storm injury, when they no longer fit into the landscape, or when they become maintenance problems.

An individual can easily remove a tree and stump of 6 inches or less in diameter. Cutting down the tree is straightforward as long as there are no obstructions that could be damaged by the falling tree. However, a professional arborist should remove larger trees. Arborists have the training and equipment to remove trees safely and without damage to persons, property or utility wires.

Before authorizing any work, check with the Better Business Bureau for the company's service record.



It is the homeowner's decision as to whether the tree stump is to remain or be removed. Leaving a tree stump in the yard can result in numerous problems—a lawn-mowing obstacle, a great place to stub your toes, and a nutrient source for developing mushrooms.

Stump removal can be made easy or difficult ... choose easy! When the tree is removed, leave 3 to 4 feet of trunk above the soil surface. Doing so will provide leverage and greatly assist with the removal of the stump. Start by digging about a 3-foot circle around the tree stump. The large exposed roots can be severed by either an axe or saw. Cut the large roots close to the tree stump and again at the edge of the hole you have dug. Removing sections of the root, and placing them in a pile, will make the project much easier. Small feeder roots may be severed with a pair of long handled pruning shears. Abundant roots often make digging around the tree stump difficult. Spraying a stream of water into the excavation hole will aid in locating roots, and the moistened soil will be easier to remove from the hole.

Once the obvious surface roots around the stump have been removed, the tree stump, protruding 3 to 4 feet above the ground, can be rocked back and forth. The rocking motion will break off some of the smaller roots and reveal larger roots that need to be severed. Continue rocking the tree stump and severing the roots until it can be pulled out of the hole. People who own a truck or suitable SUV can use a winch or place a chain around the stump to help pull it out of the hole.

The stumps of larger trees should be ground out. Homeowners should inform the contractor of their expectations prior to work starting. If the homeowner is going to place sod over the area where the tree once grew, the stump might be ground out to the

depth of 12-inches. When a replacement tree is to be planted in the same, or a nearby, location the stump should be ground deeply enough to remove all or nearly all of it.

Stump grinding will generate a significant quantity of wood chips. The wood chips can be used as mulch or composted before mixing into the soil to provide much needed organic matter. Do not be surprised if mushrooms begin to appear in the stump removal area in several years. Their appearance indicates that the remaining tree roots and wood chips are breaking down. If the lawn, or other plants in the area are light green to yellow in color, apply a nitrogen fertilizer because the microorganisms that are actively breaking down the tree roots are removing the available nitrogen from the soil.

Suckers may develop from the tree roots left in the ground when trees such as aspen, silver maples or cottonwoods are removed. Pruning the developing suckers or shoots with a lawnmower or pruning shears will keep new trees from becoming established. It may take up to two years for the tree roots to die and cease the production of suckers.

Submitted by Ed Carley, Colorado State University Master Gardener. For additional, gardening information, refer to the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension's web site, (www.ext.colostate.edu), contact the El Paso County Master Gardener Hotline, 636-8921 or e-mail questions or requests for information to CSUmg2@elpasoco.com

Our Favorite Tools

Carey Harrington, Colorado Master Gardener

This marks the initial installment of a regular column detailing favorite tools of Master Gardeners - a good place to look if needing to buy a gift for a deserving gardener (including yourself!).

Our first tool.....the Hori Knife!

As Master Gardener Ed Carley says, this tool is “great for transplanting, dividing perennials, and general gardening.” Sound too good to be true? It's not. This is one versatile little tool that many gardeners love. In fact, this treasured tool is bestowed on volunteers at the Colorado Springs Utilities Xeriscape Demonstration Garden after forty hours of service. They find the serrated edge of the blade makes it ideal for weeding, light digging, and other tasks around the garden.

The tool is sometimes called a Japanese Farmer's Knife and is available in two versions: the carbon steel blade or the shiny, too sharp, and more expensive stainless steel blade. It comes with a nifty slipcover decorated with a picture of a rabbit and some Japanese writing. I had wondered for years what the writing actually said, and a visiting Japanese gardener translated for me, “It says hori hori!” Mystery solved.

You might think a 10-inch long tool would be hard to lose in the garden, but the Hori's colors let it disappear in a pile of soil or leaves pretty easily. If you are prone to losing tools, consider painting the handle or somehow marking it to make it more visible (one gardener ties a piece of bright orange ribbon around the handle of hers). I always stow mine in a handy gardener's tool belt (but that is a subject for a future column).

This tool costs approximately \$25 (carbon steel version) and can be found at several local garden centers or online at Lee Valley Tools, www.leevalley.com

Okay, So I've Procrastinated Again...

Nadine Salmons, Colorado Master Gardener

Tomorrow is my husband's (mother, father, aunt, brother, son, etc. fill in the blank appropriately) birthday. What to get her/him? Let's see, besides being a relative this person is also an avid gardener. Hmmmm.....

What about another book? She's really interested in herbs. How about Jekka McVicar's new book of herbs [DK Publishing, 2002, 288p, \$30.00 ISBN:0-7894-894-22.] This is a catalog of 100 of her favorite herbs. She supplies us with easy recipes using a wide range of organic herbs for both healthy eating and natural homecare.

If not, how about Carol Ann Rinzler's New complete book of herbs, spices, and condiments, [Facts on File, 2001, 422p, \$50.00.] This is an authoritative, easy to read, alphabetically listed nutritional, medical, and culinary guide. The entries are presented as individual health products and give a nutritional profile all backed by authoritative medical sources.

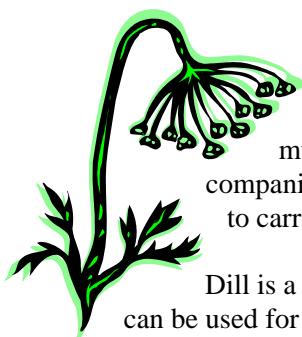
No, she has lots of those, and she deserves better. I know, The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants [Dorling Kindersley Pub., 1996, ISBN 0-7894-1943-2, \$80.00.] This thousand plus page directory describes, in beautiful color, the botany and cultivation of plants besides listing ornamental plant groups and then an extensive plant directory. It includes both Latin and common names of all plants listed. Or maybe, The Brooklyn Botanic Garden Gardener's Desk Reference [Henry Holt & Co., 1998, 816p, \$40.00.] This is a more user friendly reference with everything from a gardener's atlas, information about the botany of plants, plant conservation, ecology, ideas for kitchen or ornamental gardening, safe pest control, indoor or city gardening, gardening tools, places to visit, poisonous plants, some plants in literature and lore, and plant trivia.

Now that I know what I want to get, where to find it? Let my fingers do the walking on the Internet, or find the nearest garden/bookstore and call to have them hold the item for me.

Aah, success at last! Now let's think about the next occasion. No, too early.

Herbs for All Seasons: My Favorites - Part 1

Nadine Salmons, Colorado Master Gardener



Dill [*Anethum graveolens*], the herb for all occasions. Why dill? Why not!?

To me, dill is one of the most nature friendly plants. For the lazy gardener, seed once and reap multiple harvests. This plant likes to reseed itself and spreads voraciously. It seems to be a good companion plant in preventing fewer cabbage aphids. [Some experts claim it is not a good companion plant to carrots.]

Dill is a pretty background plant for lower growing flowers in the front yard, and has a multitude of uses. It can be used for preserving pickles, making vinegar and flavoring breads, fish, potatoes, tomatoes, etc. It is useful for a calming stomach brew - 1 T. of seeds to 16 ounces of water, let brew for 10 minutes and strain before drinking.

Dill is useful for beneficial insects, butterflies, at almost all their stages of development, hummingbirds, and bees. All love this herb for its nectar. It can be dried and used year round or in potpourri.

Well, there you have it, multiple ways to make dill your favorite herb.

A Winter Wonderland

Stephanie Jensen, Colorado Master Gardener

Shrub and flower beds look great during the spring, summer and fall, but aren't very exciting during the cold winter months. I don't know about you, but January is not my favorite month. When I moved into my current home, the dreariness of the landscape made me wish for warmer days. From day one, I started evaluating my yard from both a summer and winter point of view.

To start the evaluation process, all you need to do is look out your windows. Where do you spend the most time when you are indoors? Start with that view and use your imagination to create a point of interest worth looking at in the winter. It could be anything from plantings to hardscapes -- like a bed of ornamental grasses, a specimen tree, or a rock wall.

There are endless books and magazines on the subject of design, but you can also walk different neighborhoods to pick up interesting ideas. Visit as many public gardens as you can in the fall and winter (especially after a snow). Denver Botanical Gardens, the HAS Garden in Monument Valley Park, and Hillside Gardens are just a few of your options. One of my favorite resources for information is the Xeriscape Demonstration Garden. As a volunteer in this garden for many years, I've become familiar with plants that have characteristics that are valuable for more than one season. All of these gardens are open year-round and all have plantings and/or hardscapes that look good in the winter. Don't forget to take a camera or a notebook to note the things you like. If you have a memory like mine, after a few days, you won't remember what you saw.

A lot of these ideas can be put into place during one season, but other projects have to evolve over time. I've been developing my yard for over 4 years and am finally coming to the end of my wish list. I've learned something every step of the way, and it's been exciting to see the changes that have slowly taken place. I recommend that you keep a garden journal or a photographic record throughout all the projects. Then when you start thinking you haven't done much, all you have to do is look at these records to see the work you've accomplished.

Now I love to look out the window in any season and I've been known to run out with my camera to record the moment the feather reed grass is backlit by the sun or the coneflower seedheads are capped by snow.



If you haven't thought about your winter landscape before, try planning a new project for next year. It'll give you something to do until spring!

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One of my favorite descriptors is “drought tolerant”. Let’s face it: drought conditions in humid areas of the country are still more moist than normal conditions in El Paso County. So, what can we learn from a catalog describing *Echinaceae*, for instance, as drought tolerant? Very often this means a plant will recover from the stress of drying out, if water is administered before the leaves become crispy critters. “Drought resistant” varieties, on the other hand, should refer to plants having their own strategies for both lack of soil moisture and lack of humidity.

Conversely, when I read phrases such as “tolerates humid conditions” or “tolerates soil moisture” that’s a clue a plant normally associated with drier conditions has found it’s way into nurseries accustomed to serving gardeners in greener places. I might give it a try.

Once the catalogs have helped you determined the type of veggies, fruits, and ornamentals you want for the coming season, there are other questions to consider.

First, will you want plants or seeds? Seeds are most often the choice for vegetables and annual flowers. However, seeds are also available for herbs, perennials, even shrubs and trees. Advantages to seeds include relatively low prices, ease of shipping, and plant selection. As to the latter, indeed, seeds may be the only method of procuring rare, unusual, or heirloom selections. Some catalogs even specialize in these offerings. The main drawback to seeds is providing an optimal setting for germination. If, in order to enjoy fruits or flowers, the catalog suggests starting indoors prior to last frost, adequate space, light, heat and moisture must be available. Following germination and a growing period of up to eight weeks, your tender plants will require hardening off. The entire process requires the additional resource of time. When you have all of these resources, go for it. Growing from seed can be very satisfying. If you’re short on time or space, however, call around to local garden centers and find out if they’ll be carrying, ready to transplant, the varieties you’re looking for. If you call early enough, you might even be able to request a more unusual variety. Another drawback to seeds, is the wait involved, especially in nursing perennials, shrubs and trees to maturity.

Well, then, if seeds prove too much trouble or are too slow, is it actually wise to order plants from catalogs? Again, it may be the only way to purchase unusual varieties. It can’t hurt to phone local nurseries first to find out if they’ll carry what you’re looking for. If not, here’s what to expect: Plants are normally shipped in one of two forms, bare root and potted. The advantages include a quicker start than with seeds and avoiding the nursing process. The disadvantages include expense and dealing with damaged shipments. Shipping live plant materials is a delicate and costly operation. Look for companies that guarantee to replace damaged goods or wrongly shipped varieties. Be prepared, as well, the plant or the root may be small. It can come as a shock to pay 6.95 plus shipping for something that will take two or three seasons to mature in your perennial garden, or pay much more for a tree that will bear a dozen fruit next year.

Finally, there are more and more catalogs and resources geared toward gardeners living in our region. A partial list includes: High Country Gardens, 2902 Rufina Street, Santa Fe, NM 87507, www.highcountrygardens.com; Plants of the Southwest, 3095 Agua Fria Street, Santa Fe, NM 87507, www.plantsofthesouthwest.com; Seeds of Change, P.O. Box 15700, Santa Fe, NM 87592, www.seedsofchange.com; Sunscapes Rare Plant Nursery, www.sunscapes.net. Always check local sources too.

I’m old enough to remember when mail order catalogs were known as wish books. So, I understand that garden catalogs have uses beyond creating sales. They can be sources of inspiration as well as education. Like a bright geranium blooming on a kitchen windowsill, they can lift our spirits and let us know summer’s on its way. Maps on a treasure hunt, they can be decoded for your gardening success.