The Garden Path

The path to an environmentally sound and beautiful landscape

January 2009

Seed Sources
by Carl Shafer, Master Gardener

As a new gardening year begins, the question of what seeds do we need and where do we get them arises. For common varieties, the most convenient and economical sources are local farm supply stores and seed racks in local stores. For less common seeds we turn to mail order and/or the internet. Most mail order firms have web sites where catalogs can be requested. A sampling of catalogs and their web sites follows:

**Burpee** ([www.burpee.com](http://www.burpee.com)). Many flowers, hybrids, Exclusives, and some heirlooms.

**Park Seed** ([www.parkseed.com](http://www.parkseed.com)). Many flowers, hybrids, and some organics.

**Johnny’s Selected Seeds** ([www.johnnyseeds.com](http://www.johnnyseeds.com)). Most varieties sold untreated, some also available treated. Many organics, large selection of lettuce and greens. Has very detailed growing information, catalog is almost a gardening handbook.

**Pinetree Garden Seeds** ([www.superseeds.com](http://www.superseeds.com)). Many vegetable and flower seeds in smaller, cheaper packets for the home gardener.

**Totally Tomatoes** ([www.totallytomato.com](http://www.totallytomato.com)). Index lists 280 varieties of tomatoes and 151 varieties of peppers. I counted them!

**Vermont bean Seed Company** ([www.vermontbean.com](http://www.vermontbean.com)). Eleven pages of bean seeds and a good selection of herb and vegetable seeds.

**Territorial Seed Company** ([www.territorialseed.com](http://www.territorialseed.com)). Large catalog of vegetables and flowers for home gardeners. Many open-pollinated vegetables. Has detailed growing information. Located in Oregon.


**Seed Savers Exchange** ([www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)). A non-profit membership organization dedicated to conserving and promoting heirloom vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers. Farm in Iowa. Maintains over 25,000 endangered varieties. 2008 catalog offered 647 total varieties to non-members. Members have access to rare varieties offered by other members.

**Seeds of Change** ([www.seedsofchange.com](http://www.seedsofchange.com)). All organic, open-pollinated seeds. All grown by Seeds of Change and their nation wide network of growers.
This is a sample of catalogs that are available, and not a recommendation for these over others that are available. A Google search for “vegetable seed catalogs” gave about 113,000 results, and for “flower seed catalogs” gave about 174,000 results; so you can see, there is a huge selection out there.

Before you order from an unfamiliar company, you may want to check out Dave’s Garden (www.davesgarden.com). This is a large gardening site that has a section called “Garden Watchdog”, where gardeners can sign up and share their opinions of companies they have dealt with. Since 1994, over 3,400 companies have been reviewed.

**Interesting Tid-bits**  
by Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Biochar may cause the next revolution in gardening. It is charred organic material, not ashes, and when added to the soil renders the soil more productive AND it improves the ability of the soil to trap greenhouse gases. “….recent tests with typical weathered tropical soils show that adding both charcoal and fertilizer can increase crop yields almost tenfold. And when charcoal was added at 20 pounds per 100 square feet to fertile soils in England, soybean biomass doubled, wheat biomass tripled.” “…..an International Biochar Initiative was established in England in September (www.biochar-international.org), and a Senate amendment to the 2008 Farm Bill promotes extensive research on biochar’s ‘value for soil enhancement and carbon sequestration.’” To do your own test, save some charred wood from the fireplace, or burn any organic material (but not to the ashes state), and combine it with organic fertilizer in your garden this spring. From The Avant Gardener, Vol. 41, No. 2, December 2008.

Want to pick hardy citrus from trees you grow? Keith Endres picks as many as 200 fruits each autumn from his hardy satsuma mandarin tree (*Citrus reticulata* ‘Owari’) in Wake Co. The fruit have the taste of a sweet tangerine, and his tree is seven years old, has a weeping habit, and is about 10 feet tall x five feet wide. It has survived without protection to about 16 degrees F. He has been experimenting with various citrus since 2001 and has about 50 trees under loblolly pines in his USDA Zone 7b garden. Since the roots of some citrus may not be hardy, they are often grafted onto *Poncirus* roots – hardy to about 0 degrees. From an article “Hardy Citrus” by Bobby Ward of Raleigh in the Dec.’08/Jan.’09 issue of “Horticulture” magazine. Sounds like something we should be trying! The magazine lists sources of trees.

Beware of callery pears, of which ‘Bradford’ is one. Even new, self sterile cultivars should not be used in much of the country since different cultivars planted near one another can cross pollinate, resulting in tasty fruit that birds consume and distribute via droppings. Evidence of this type of cross breeding has been documented by biologists at the University of Cincinnati. Try alternatives such as serviceberry (*Amelanchier*), yellowwood (*Cladrastis*) or fringe tree (*Chionanthus*). From the Aug., Sept., Oct. issue of “Organic Gardening.”

**Plant of the month**  
by Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Dixie Rosemary, Cumberland Rosemary, Gray Rosemary (*Conradina canescens*)

Not a rosemary at all, this native plant just looks similar to rosemary and has a pleasant smell when rubbed. The scent is a light lavender-oregano-thyme blend, not as heavy a scent as any of those herbs, and definitely
not that of rosemary. It is a shrub that grows 1 to 2 feet tall by about that width and is evergreen, or rather, ever-gray-green. The color of the leaves and stems is what sets it apart and makes it a stand-out in the perennial bed, and as now, a focal point in a bed where everything else has gone dormant. Around April and May, it is covered with small lavender flowers similar to snapdragons. The leaves are very small and slender, almost needle-like, and grow in clusters separated by about ½ inch of stem. The plant is native to certain counties in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi and is USDA listed as threatened. This means that it can be purchased only from nurseries with the appropriate propagation permit. It is listed in a catalog from a nursery in SC, but they can sell it only within SC; a local nursery lists it in its mail order catalog; I got one some years ago at a garden center in NC; and another species was available for sale at a recent Friends of the Arboretum lecture at the JCRA.

This plant grows best in sandy soil but can be successfully grown in average, very well-drained, slightly acidic soil in full to partial sun. It is drought tolerant once established, and it is deer resistant.

**JANUARY TO DO!**

**Fruits and Veggies**  
**By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener, Vance County**

- Prune fruit trees and grape vines this month if the weather cooperates. Finish next month if necessary.
- After pruning, apply dormant spray when the temperature will remain above freezing until the spray can dry. For the dormant spray only, dormant oil and lime-sulfur may be combined. When leaves are present this combination will burn them.

**Landscaping & Lawn Care**  
**By Onda Marable, Master Gardener, Vance County**

- A hot cup of tea, a fire and garden catalogs make the winter season brighter.
- Order plants from your catalogs, now, to reserve them and be sure of early delivery.
- Do your heavy shrub planting in late winter.
- Even though the holidays are a memory, continue to use evergreens to decorate your house and cheer your spirits.
- If your are planning on saving your Christmas Poinsettias, cut them back, transplant to a larger pot with good potting soil and give them a light liquid fertilizer. With good care they can be carried over to next season and rebloom.
ROSE TIPS
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

Whether you are adding to an existing rose garden or just starting to grow roses for the first time, all those garden catalogs you’ve been receiving in the mail will help you decide what rose varieties are available for you to add to your landscape.

The location you have available must be able to support new rose bushes by providing at least six hours of full sun daily, fertile soil, and adequate drainage. Once you have established a suitable location, it is time to decide what role you want your roses to play in your garden. Whether it is for producing flowers for inside arrangements, creating a hedge for the property line, concealing yard obstructions, or just for enhancing the beauty of the yard, there are plenty of varieties available for consideration. Many catalogs offer an opportunity to purchase the new rose introductions for the upcoming growing year.

When purchasing new bushes over the internet or by catalog mail order, I prefer to get them in the bare root stage and request that they be delivered by the middle of February for planting in this area of NC. If you prefer to wait until planting time to select your rose bushes, you should be able to find several varieties to choose from at a local nursery or retail store.

Once you have made your decision and ordered your rose varieties for the new growing season, it is time to be sure all you’re planting and pruning equipment is in order. To be prepared for pruning in late February and early March, it is most important to have a good pair of bypass pruning shears. The anvil-type blade tends to crush the stems rather than cutting cleanly, so I do not encourage using this type to prune your bushes. You should also have a pair of lopping shears and a pruning saw to remove large woody canes. This will enable you to make clean cuttings without damage to the bud union. Be sure you have cleaned, sharpened and oiled your tools so they will be ready for use come planting and pruning time.

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