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Well, it has a blue flower—well, sort of blue. Some people might call it purplish. You never know about people and colours. A bit like a rose—well, not like a rose really, but double, sort of, if you know what I mean. How high does it grow? Oh! about 18 inches—no, perhaps two feet, yes, more like two feet. Leaves? Well, they're big, I mean long. And shaggy, sort of. Is it hardy? Oh! yes, it grows outside. Perennial? Oh! yes, it's in flower all the time. That's the beauty of it, as my friend Mrs Anstey says, never out of flower. She got it at the market and it's never looked back. She says she wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't a poppy.'

No, of course, the voice isn't yours, though it might well have been. Nor is the low, protracted groan you can hear in the background the noise of a crowd of cricket spectators greeting a dropped catch. It is merely the concerted sound of an army of nurserymen trying vainly to play detective on the clues offered by a prospective customer.

Long ago, in my early days as a gardener, I met a man who in all honesty admitted he couldn't tell a row of cabbages from a patch of potatoes. I naturally laughed at such untutored ignorance. Now I know better. I know that the world is full of people who cannot tell cabbages from potatoes.

Ask any nurseryman what is the great bane, the great heartache, of his life and he will refer you to the voice that can be heard expressing itself so coherently in paragraph one. That it is the voice of the burning enthusiast, full of earnest, rapturous desire to have a garden, is beyond doubt, but nevertheless it drives the nurseryman to near despair. Some day one of the wretched unfortunates will publish a book, probably called *Bedlam Floriana: being the Confessions and Correspondence of a Broken Nurseryman*, and only nurserymen will believe what it says.

As I suggested in the very first article of *From My Garden*, the ability to read, and not merely to dig with a fork, is the way to gardening success. That the market is now flooded with books on every possible aspect of horticulture, from orchids to mustard-and-cress, alpinists to Virginian Stock, is clear proof of this. It is just as clear that to acquire a complete library on gardening is solely the prerogative of millionaires. I am, therefore, the champion of good gardening catalogues: the greatest free, or almost free, library a gardener can have.

Of all general catalogues *The Planters Handbook* of George Jackman

FROM MY GARDEN

spare the nurseryman

by
H. E. Bates

the well-known novelist writes
about how his garden grows



and Son, Woking (3s 6d) is the best I know. As well as offering an excellent range of trees, shrubs, climbers, alpinists, herbaceous plants and fruit trees, it packs more good sense into a few paragraphs than many a gardening book spreads over whole chapters. Indeed it could be argued that, once armed with this catalogue, you need little other general gardening literature. The catalogues of R. C. Notcutt Ltd, Woodbridge, Suffolk, specialists in lilacs as well as a great range of other things, and those of F. Toynbee's Croftway Nurseries, Barnham, Bognor Regis, are almost as good. It is probable that the various catalogues issued by Hilliers and Sons of Winchester from their enormous nurseries offer a greater range of stock than any other, and the small charges made for some of these catalogues are surely out of all proportion to the value offered.


Out of all the thousands of seed catalogues issued annually there is one that is not merely indispensable. It is a bible in itself. The catalogue of Thompson and Morgan Ltd, Ipswich, has been a boon to gardeners for more than 100 years. It costs a mere two shillings. It offers more than 5,000 varieties of seed, ranging from rare alpinists to tropical and sub-tropical trees, ornamental grasses to sweet peas, greenhouse exotics to French potatoes, from minute treasures of the Andes

to the giant trees of California. For myself I have been reading it assiduously for over 40 years and hitherto have had only one criticism: the poor quality of its coloured illustrations. Happily this is remedied in the newest issue, so that illustrations are now worthy of the text. Thompson and Morgan also issue a comprehensive bulb and plant catalogue.

To be able to see what a plant or flower looks like—this is the great heartcry of the less tutored gardener. One good splash of authentic colour will not only set the nerves of his eyes tingling but have him reaching for his purse twice as fast as some dry, humdrum description beginning *F. I. Hybrid. Novelty. A Californian strain that supersedes older varieties*. A good example of a bright eye-catcher is P. de Jager's (Marden, Kent) catalogue of the latest hybrid lilies, including the new de Graaff strains from America, a lavish affair partnered by the same firm's opulent list devoted exclusively to irises. Their winter and summer catalogues of bulbs are issued on the same principle of 'where the eye is dazzled the cheque book will follow'.

Almost into the same category I put two rose catalogues, Harry Wheatcroft's of Edwalton, Nottinghamshire, and Edwin Murrell's of Shrewsbury, the latter modest pictorially, but richly helpful in text. If you desire to grow begonias that will scald your neighbours with envy, then I suggest you get the catalogue of Blackmore and Langdon Ltd, Bath, who will proceed to hypnotise you still further with gloxinias, delphiniums, polyanthus, phlox and other delights. The best is not cheap and in my experience the delphiniums and polyanthus of Blackmore and Langdon are the best.

'I can never remember the names of plants. Show me a picture and I will tell you if it is the one I mean'—there, indeed, is the crux of the matter. I take these words from a book which is bible, encyclopaedia, portrait gallery and detective agency in one: *The Gardener's Golden Treasury* (Collingridge, £2 10s). This rich, fat tome is more than 1,000 pages long and if you had to have one gardening book and one only, this would be it. For here is the picture gallery of no less than 1,100 different plants, trees and flowers, where you cannot fail to find your plant that 'looks a bit like a rose and is blue—no, purplish'. The book has never failed me yet.

Read on, therefore, you gardeners, and spare the nurseryman. 

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