

## Catalog Cautions

Of late, I have received many calls concerning “miracle” landscape plants advertised in various publications and online. The cliché, “if it seems too good to be true, it probably is” is correct. An example of this includes a person I worked for as a teenager maintaining the yard. Her father had purchased thirty or forty “miracle” bulbs, called star of Bethlehem, he found advertised in a local publication the 1950s. By the 1960s, the plant had spread over 2 acres of ground through both the lawn and garden. The plant made it very difficult to mow and grow crops. It also could not be killed by herbicides available to homeowners.

Extreme caution is always needed with this kind of advertisement. Plants I have seen advertised lately that potentially could be grouped into this marginal category include trees that provide fast shade and turfgrass seed that creates a lawn in less than a week. The advertised trees are a hybrid willow that will grow between ten and twenty feet a year. Included with this benefit, but not mention in the ad, are such “features” as the potential of the tree to fall over on a house, heave sidewalks, roots that penetrate plumbing and susceptibility to many pests and diseases. One of my former instructors called these types of trees \$3,020 trees. The initial cost was twenty dollars and after several years they would cause at least \$3,000 in damage and have to be removed.

Further, the miracle lawn I read of included highlights in the advertisement of extreme cold-hardiness, fast germination, excellent wear resistance and the fact that the blend was used on golf courses across the United States and Canada. These are all true to a point. The ad failed to mention that one using this particular blend would have to reseed every year because the two major components of the blend, annual ryegrass and perennial ryegrass are relatively short lived. Golf courses that use a similar blend do reseed annually.

Additionally, a pound of this blend will cover a ten foot by twenty-five foot area. Not a large space. At nearly twenty dollars a pound, someone is making quite a bit of money. The same or a similar blend purchased at a local garden center would cost between two and four dollars a pound. However, I would never recommend planting it unless someone needed very temporary turf.

A red flag to watch for in determining these types of ads are plants having obscure or made-up names that cannot be easily researched. Most reputable companies include both a common and Latin plant name in their advertisements. Latin names are absolute and can be researched online and in horticultural publications. The best advice I can offer is, when in doubt, do not purchase. USU Extension has experienced staff and volunteers in most counties that are happy to answer questions and recommend quality plants adapted to the local landscape. Additionally, local garden centers have experienced employees that can answer many questions.