

## 10 Tips for having success with gardening catalogs

By Taun Beddes, USU Extension Assistant Professor

Gardening catalogs are arriving. They can have some excellent suggestions for helping plan for the upcoming season and fun plants to try. However, caution is needed. Here is a list of practical tips to help you succeed.

1. Research unfamiliar species and varieties Before adding plants to your shopping cart. This will help you avoid problems such as overcrowding or inappropriate growing conditions later.
2. Measure the area where you plan to plant. Be aware of the spacing guidelines for vegetables, trees, shrubs, annuals, and perennials. Plants don't stop growing after a few years.
3. Know how big plants will grow several years down the road. Plant tags often give a 5–10 year size estimate. However, plants do not stop growing. Use easy references to learn how various measurements are. For example, 2.5 - 3 ft is around waist-high for most adults. Ten feet is as tall as a basketball hoop. The tallest trees in Utah are 50 ft – 60 ft tall and wide. This will give you a reference as to how big things will get as compared to the space you want to plant them in. This is especially useful for shrubs and trees.
4. Watch out for “too good to be true” plant descriptions like “grows anywhere, fills in rapidly, rapid shade, instant shade tree, and worry-free.” These often indicate that the plant may quickly outgrow its space, be extremely weak wooded, challenging to eliminate, and shade the lawn and other plants growing underneath.
5. Many popular landscape plants nationally struggle in Utah's soils, low humidity, and summer heat. Examples include red maple, silver maple, dogwood trees, rhododendrons, azaleas, and bigleaf hydrangea.
6. Plant cold-hardiness is expressed in terms of USDA cold-hardiness zones. The Wasatch Front is included in Zones 6 and 7, with average lows ranging from –10 F to 10 F. Plant catalogs sometimes push plant cold hardiness to the extreme.
7. If purchasing seeds, know if they must be started indoors or in the garden. Starting seeds indoors requires supplemental lighting and seed-starting supplies like potting soil, trays, and inserts. Additionally, not all species should be started at the same time. For example, onions are started indoors in mid-January, but tomatoes are started in early April. You also need to know when to plant outdoors. Planting times vary from mid-March for cool-season crops to mid-May for frost-tender plants like tomatoes and peppers.
8. Be brave with your purchases because many fantastic flower and vegetable varieties never become very popular.
9. Keep a gardening journal to record what you purchased, including varieties, how well it did, yields, diseases or pest problems, and anything else. Additionally, make maps of where plant. This is especially important for your annual and vegetable gardens for rotation purposes.
10. It is tempting to buy lots of seeds you will not have room for. My rule is to buy around 20% more seeds than I need. That gives me a buffer if a few seeds do not germinate or some die before I plant them outdoors.

For seasoned gardeners and newcomers alike, these tips can help maximize the enjoyment and productivity of your garden. With some preparation and creativity, you can transform your outdoor space into a flourishing oasis this season.