

The Perfect Squash For Small Gardens

BY NORMAN WINTER

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Squash and pumpkin for small urban gardens and containers seems like an idea that is simply too good to be true. Last week I wrote about Buckingham yellow zucchini and now I want to recommend Balmoral, a hybrid patty pan type summer squash.

I have always wondered about what seems to be the popularity problem with summer squash. Could it be that until now summer squash has been a vine-type plant that runs rampant in the garden or is it that we simply get stuck in our ways, plant a couple of yellow crook neck maybe a green zucchini and that is it? The Balmoral will offer a flavor that the whole family will love, providing a unique touch to the family table.

Besides being tasty, you've got to give it a try because it fits in the small compact gardens for today's urban lots as well as offering a wonderful plant with exotic blossoms on the porch patio or deck. Catalogues describe Balmoral as setting fruit along the stem much like a Brussels sprout. Indeed that is how it sets those delicious squash, but it is just not straight up like on pole.

There is really no secret to growing this type of squash. If you are growing in a small, outdoor bed there should be plenty of sun and the soil should be fertile and organic-rich. That is one thing nice about the today's urban style garden; soil improvement is easy, by bringing in organic matter ensuring that you will always have the green thumb.

Plant your seeds once spring has arrived



Balmoral perfect summer squash for the small garden seems like an idea that is simply too good to be true.

and the soil has warmed. Sow the seeds about 1 inch deep. You can plant two to three seeds to a hill or in short rows. Don't forget a two or three seeds in a container will provide an abundance of squash for the table.

Again the Balmoral is a creamy white scalloped patty pan type that you may want to

initially try harvesting when they are 3 to 4 inches in diameter. These are young and tender and used much like a zucchini. Slightly larger fruit may be cut and used by hollowing out and using them for stuffing. These larger fruits may also be grated or shredded for baking in breads and other items.

Pay attention to not allow these summer squash to become too large, hard and seedy because this will reduce the energy level of the plant that could be better used to produce more young fruit. Do harvest oversized unusable squash with developed seeds and throw them away. Examine your the plants every day or so. Like other squash the Balmoral will grow rapidly, especially in hot weather and will generally be ready to harvest within 4 to 8 days after flowering.

We are still in the grip of winter but there is ample opportunity to order these new compact vegetables so you can plant this spring directly in your soil or containers or in the case of peppers and tomatoes you will have plenty of time to grow garden transplants. Vegetable gardening is an activity the whole family will enjoy. Make this the year you get back outside. For more information about compact vegetable gardens write to winter@naba.org.

ABOUT THE WRITER: Norman Winter is executive director of The National Butterfly Center in Mission, Texas, and author of "Tough-as-Nails Flowers for the South" and "Captivating Combinations: Color and Style in the Garden." Contact him at: winter@naba.org.

Weed Patch

Waiting For Spring Is Hard To Do

BY LINDA WUEBBEN

P&D Correspondent

Well Shirley, you are right! Last fall when we (rather I) wanted to get the garden fall-tilled, we had to consider that 15-foot row of carrots planted smack dab in the middle which was still in the ground. The thing was – they didn't taste very good at all. The year before, the carrots tasted great and Bob and I had no problem eating them. These carrots just kind of sat there in the ground as we didn't like to eat them.

Then Bob talked to Shirley. She told him if he would leave them there over the winter and cover them with straw, in the spring, they would be sweeter. Could it be true?

There wouldn't be a better time to try it, although I was disappointed my garden wouldn't get tilled until spring. I don't like to look at all the weeds I didn't get pulled all winter long. Bob took the skidloader and pushed the dry garden trash together in a pile and burned it so it was more acceptable. He covered the carrots with some old hay, which the dogs really enjoy laying on, and we waited for spring.

Then a couple weeks ago, when the weather was unbelievably warm and so unseasonably nice, Bob headed out to the garden with a spade and uncovered a part of the row. He dug beautiful carrots with bright green tops and we cleaned them up.

We were both amazed. They tasted great! We couldn't eat them fast enough. He covered the row back up but was contemplating digging some more when the snow and ice came, so now we'll wait some more.

Waiting for spring is kind of hard this time of year. Seed catalogs abound and that old itch is back — getting in the garden. Of course, it only lasts until the middle of June or so, but still, anticipation of warmer weather and green grass grows to a fever pitch by the time March gets here.

Can you just smell those visions of sweet corn, warm and



Wuebben

yellow, dancing in your mind? And tomatoes... there is nothing to compare to that fresh-picked taste.

We were still Christmas-ing until last week in our family. We were expecting the arrival of new grandchild at the turn of the year and we waited until the new parents could travel with our first granddaughter. So my decorations are all still hanging from each and every nook and cranny in my house. I kind of enjoy the bright colors and keeping the spirit around for a few extra weeks makes it easier to de-decorate.

But now as February breaks open, I'm ready to stuff all that green and red paraphernalia away in their proper boxes and tubs. It doesn't seem quite so long until spring now that February is nearly here. At least this long month of January has whizzed by with great weather and warm temperatures. Can't ever remember a January like this.

We had a great time and played the Wuebben version of "Let's Make a Deal" complete with more than \$60 worth of cash and prizes. Laughter bounced off our basement walls and bonds were strengthened.

We had a traditional turkey dinner with all the trimmings and one of the special family favorites is our rabbit tray — carrots (from our garden), celery, broccoli, cauliflower, radishes, cucumber slices and recently we added tiny, bite-size tomatoes — a feast in itself. The tomatoes were especially tasty and yes, I was looking out the window seeing visions of green tomato plants blooming in the warm summer sun while I ate one.

Summer can't come too soon.

But, when I plant my garden this spring, I will carefully plan where I plant those carrots this year so they are not in the middle and prevent fall-tilling of the garden soil.

Diggin' In: Edibles You Grow And Eat

BY KATHY VAN MULLEKOM

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Author and North Carolina gardener Nan Chase writes about her passion — edibles you grow and eat.

Her book, "Eat Your Yard! Edible trees, shrubs, vines, herbs and flowers for your landscape," encourages you to pick plants for their beauty as well as their taste and table value.

"Gardening was cheap and something I could do with the kids at home," says Chase of her 30-year pastime.

"I urge people with any size yard to use good landscape plants that produce food they like to eat. My current yard is less than one-tenth of an acre. Growing an edible landscape is a joy."

Here's what Chase says about her five favorite edibles:

Crabapples are easy fruit trees because they are compact,

need little pruning and are pest and disease free. They enhance the landscape and help pollination, and they produce lots of fruit — early that can be used for juices and sauces, dehydrated, and otherwise put up in large quantities.

Plant grapes because there are varieties galore, including native American grapes that produce prolifically along the Eastern seaboard. Chase likes a mixture of Niagara type eating grapes, muscadine grapes, concord grapes and mystery grapes. Prune them every year for good production. Grapes like thin, hot soil. They provide leaves for pickled grape leaves (Mediterranean cooking), fresh grapes, pasteurized grape juice and wine. Grapes are ideal for small yards because they take up vertical, not horizontal, space.

Leeks are a vegetable that gets better throughout winter; the slow-growing, nutritious and delicious green loves snow. Leeks are easy to start from seed, and provide nice blue color in their leaves. Leeks are cheaper to grow than buy.

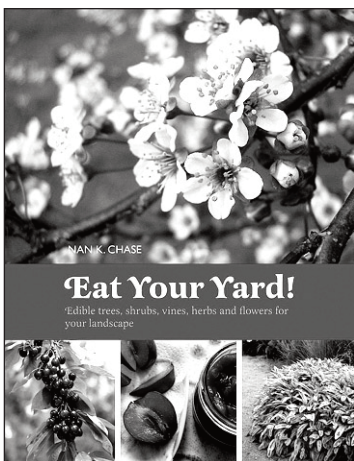
Roses are quite edible: the petals, and especially the nutritious fruits called hips. They contain tremendous Vitamin C, and can be made into jelly or tea. Beautiful in the garden, easier to

take care of than you might suspect, roses also help pollinate all fruiting plants.

Serviceberry, an American native in moist Eastern lowlands, looks lovely in a wooded setting or as a landscape specimen. The plant has lacy white blooms in early spring, abundant tasty berries in June and gorgeous fall color.

In her 150-page book, Chase gives tips that can make any size yard into an edible treasure trove. The book has information on 35 plants that offer the best of both landscape and culinary uses. Edible plants provide spring blossoms, colorful fruit and flowers, lush greenery and beautiful structure. The book also includes ideas on canning, pickling, dehydrating, freezing, juicing and fermenting.

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It's Time For The Fresh Crop Of 2012 Spring Gardening Catalogs

BY KATHY VAN MULLEKOM

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Garden catalogs are more than pages and pages of pretty pictures for casual enjoyment.

They inspire you to improve or reinvent your yard.

They describe each plant down to the number of petals on the flowers or how the leaves are arranged on stems.

They also introduce you to the latest and greatest in plant development, whether it's a new color in a coneflower or a bigger and better tomato.

For 2012, Burpee's catalog introduces its Boost Collection of six nutrient-rich vegetables designed exclusively for home gardens. All were naturally bred by traditional hybridization, with no genetically modified organisms, or unwanted GMOs, according to a Burpee spokeswoman.

Burpee claims its Boost veggies provide higher levels of disease-fighting antioxidants. For example, a half cup of Cherry Punch tomatoes delivers 90 percent of the recommended daily dose of Vitamin C, and Sweet Heat peppers produce 65 percent more Vitamin C than the average garden pepper. Its Healing Hands salad mix with four greens — mustards, radicchio and lettuce — can be harvested every three weeks for several salads. Home gardeners can purchase Boost via the print catalog or online at Burpee.com. The Gold Standard hybrid cucumber with five times the beta-carotene and Healing Hands Salad Mix are available as seeds only; the tomatoes and peppers in the collection come as seeds or plants.

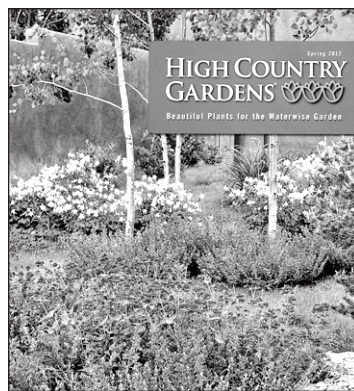
Here are 5 more catalogs, all free, worth getting because they offer a wide selection of growing material for Zones 3-10 and they do double duty as educational material:

BRENT AND BECKY'S BULBS

Always known for spectacular spring- and summer-flowering bulbs, Brent and Becky Heath have added a few perennials to their summer catalog. This year, Becky recommends a Veronica called Royal Candles with royal blue spikes that look showy in the full-sun summer border; it grows 10 to 15 inches tall and is cold hardy Zones 4-9.

The catalog also includes a couple new Colocasias, or elephant ears that add a touch of the tropics to your warm-weather gardens no matter where you live. They grow in the ground or look stunning in large pots on your patio or porch. One of the new ones is Bikini-Tini with bluish gray leaves with dark purple veins and leaves that face upward and fill with water when it rains; they stand on sturdy stems in full sun or partial shade and are rated cold hardy to Zone 6.

The Heaths, who live and garden in southeastern Virginia, also like Eucomis, nicknamed pineapple lily, because its fresh and finished flowers give the garden beautiful structure. The Heaths introduce the new Twinkle Stars with pink flowers that feature stamens that almost "glitter" with pollen; it grows 24 to 30 inches tall and is cold hardy Zones 7-9. To get the free print catalog, visit



www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com or call toll free 877-661-2852.

HIGH COUNTRY GARDENS

Brakeblights red yucca, a plant known to be a hummingbird magnet, is a new introduction for this company which specializes in perennials, ornamental grasses and shrubs that require little water. Cold hardy in Zones 5-10, the yucca produces narrow strips of foliage with dark-green, grassy non-spiny leaves that are compact and evergreen. Its nectar-rich flowers keep hummers coming all summer long.

High Country Gardens, located in Santa Fe, N.M., also unveils its Harvest Booster Perennial Collection with small- and medium-sized flowering perennials that, when planted into and around vegetable gardens and potted vegetables, attracts bees for pollination. The 12-plant selection is cold hardy in

Zones 5-9 and includes Pink Lace beebalm, Select Blue cat mint, Blue Fortune agastache, purple cone-flower, Little Lemon goldenrod and Rotkugel oregano.

If beneficial bees rank high on your list, Peter's Purple beebalm is what you need, especially if you want a species resistant to the powdery mildew that plagues most beebalms. Cold hardy in Zones 6-10, it puts on a two-month display of lavender-purple flowers and requires little water to keep the show going.

To get the free print catalog, visit www.highcountrygardens.com or call toll free 800-925-9387.

LOGEE'S

The cover of Logee's new catalog showcases what it does best — offers rare and hard-to-find plants like the container-grown Fukushu kumquat on the cover. Inside, the catalog profiles 68 new plants, including staghorn fern on volcanic rock, Bienvenue hibiscus with 6-inch, pink-swirl blooms, variegated Chinese violet with light pink-lavender blooms and orange lipstick plant.

Located in Connecticut, Logee's celebrates 120 years of offering tropical and hardy fruiting plants and an assortment of fragrant and tropical plants for containers. The company rounds out its catalog with hardy jasmine, red passion flowers, mandevilla, bamboo and angel's trumpet. Some of its oddities include chenille plant with furry-red catkins, lollipop flower with spires of yellow rocket-shaped lollipops and Chinese perfume plant with scented yellow blooms you can enjoy several times a year.

When you order, you get 2 (- or 4-inch potted plants that can go in containers or in the ground.

To get the free print catalog, visit www.logees.com or call toll free 888-330-8038.

NICHE GARDENS

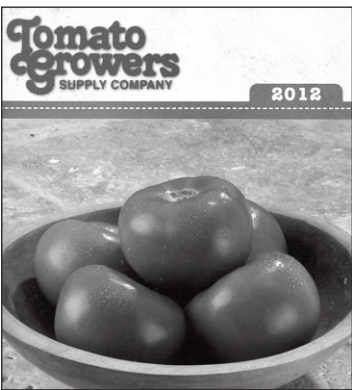
Niche Gardens is a retail and mail-order nursery that has found its niche in nursery-propagated wildflowers and native perennials, ornamental grasses, and unusual trees and shrubs. Located in Chapel Hill, N.C., the nursery's catalog is on the plain side with mostly listings of tried-and-true specimens like wild columbine cold hardy in Zones 3-8, artemisia cold hardy in Zones 3-10 and

asters for Zones 4-8. New plant offerings include two dwarf conifers — Chamaecyparis Snow and Nana Gracillis — that are small enough for almost any garden and also add a touch of living art as they grow.

Since deer are such problems for gardeners everywhere, the catalog features symbols indicating deer resistance, relying on the gardens' own experience with deer, as well as published literature on the subject.

You'll also learn that native asters have new names, as described under Ampelaster carolinianus, or climbing aster, which produces loads of tight, purplish-pink buds that open to reveal spidery rose-pink flowers that mature to lilac. At Niche Gardens, a mailbox covered in this vining aster blooms mid-October through November; the plant is cold hardy Zones 7-9 so it can be treated as a summer annual in colder climates.

To get the free print catalog, visit www.nichegardens.com or



call 919-967-0078.

TOMATO GROWERS

Everyone everywhere enjoys fresh, juicy, home-grown tomato for summertime sandwiches and salads and this catalog is all about tomatoes. New varieties for 2012 include Green Doctors and its cherry-sized green fruit and cherry cascade hybrid with cascading clusters of red cherry tomatoes — both perfect for popping in your mouth or on top of crisp salads. In all, there are 15 new tomatoes, one All-America Selections new pepper and a rare new eggplant called Pot Black.

You've got to be a seed-starting aficionado because all the tomatoes and all the other veg-

gies are offered only by seed. Therefore, the back of the catalog is devoted to seed-starting equipment and supplies like jiffy pot trays, starting mix, soil warmers and tomato pens that are made of heavy galvanized wire that fold flat for easy storing and last for many years of fresh homegrown tomatoes.

To get the free print catalog, visit www.tomatogrowers.com or call toll free 888-478-7333.

5 ORDERING TIPS

Choose hardy plants. Select plants suitable for your climate, not just because they look pretty in pictures, especially when it comes to perennials, shrubs and trees that you want to keep around for a long time. Catalogs and online sites usually provide cold-hardy zones for each species; if you don't know your zone, look for a map that illustrates the different zones or contact your extension office. Also, make sure the plant is suitable for the site in your yard, such as sun or shade, wet or dry. Read catalogs carefully for plant descriptions and tips that help you make

good choices.

Select suitable seeds. Read descriptions carefully and pick varieties that will yield the best results, especially if you live where there is a shorter growing season for summer flowers, vegetables and fruits. Also, look for disease-resistant varieties.

Be ready. Avoid ordering plants that you can't quickly put in the ground or pots. Use mild winter days to till and prep beds before your plant orders arrive. Instructions that come with the plants are your best guides.

Order early. Plants and seeds are often available in limited quantities, so place your order early to avoid disappointment. If you don't want a substitution, state so clearly on your order form.

Keep records. Make a copy of your order sheet so you have the names, item numbers, prices and dates to help you communicate clearly with a company if you have questions about an order. Also, be familiar with the company's guarantee policy before you order. — Direct Gardening Association: www.directgardeningassociation.com for more catalog sources.

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