

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

Late last August when the mail order catalogs began to arrive, we were nudged to start thinking about Christmas. Somehow, now that's over for another year, we're launched -- for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health -- rather like marriage -- into 1977.

And with the holidays behind us, different catalogs have begun to arrive. Like those pre-Christmas ones, these all display similar kinds of merchandise, are all colorfully illustrated and promise satisfaction and money-back guarantees.

There's one tremendous difference. The catalogs coming in January and February tout SPRING and the joyful renewal that follows every winter as surely as day follows night.

And the catalogs arriving now hail SUMMER and the long warm lazy days when the Cape is part of the nation's playground. Our woodlands will teem with songbirds, our flower gardens will glow with blossoms, our vegetable gardens will be lush and green, fruit trees and cranberries will bloom, set, and develop crops to be harvested in the fall.

The catalogs, of course, are seedbooks. Each one merits hours of study. How else can you decide whether to buy the plants or raise geranium from seed? How else can you imagine how handsome those hollyhocks will look, six feet tall, along the south side of your house?

Study all the descriptions of the petunias and compare them with the illustrations. Here are lavender-pink ones with ruffled petals; the book says they'll bloom early and continue to produce all season.

There's the old-fashioned clear cherry-red variety, "Happiness"; it blossoms profusely with so many simple flowers they nearly hide the bright green foliage.

There's red and white striped petunias and deep purple ones with pink stripes; they make me think of circus tents with petals only slightly ruffled at the edges.

There are pure white petunias with extra-large blossoms, so fully ruffled you can't see the flowers' centers. Blossoms like these also come in salmon pink, dark purple and orchid. That's just a sample of the available petunias.

What the catalog can't picture, describe or convey -- and neither can I -- is the fragrance of petunias, especially in the evening when they release, as though in gratitude, some of the sweetness they've stored up during the day beneath the sun.

Did you ever grow pansies from seed? The catalog suggests starting them indoors and transplanting them outside as soon as the ground can be worked. They'll stand a bit of frost and produce the same velvety flowers, ones that seem to smile at us, that we've loved every spring of our lives. And the more you pick the faster they bloom, as everyone knows who's ever planted a patch of pansies.

It's helpful to learn pansies don't object to partial shade; and to find out the primrose, a perennial that blooms early in May, will thrive in shady areas and are perfect for neglected spots. That's what my garden is -- shady and neglected. It needs plants that thrive on neglect -- like zinnias.

Zinnias, I learn from the catalog, may grow up to six inches taller in partial shade than in full sun. And wherever they're planted they'll bloom and bloom, all summer long, leaving plenty in the garden even though you pick generous quantities for bouquets.

Zinnias, like marigolds and chrysanthemums, come in all sizes, in singles, doubles, and with spoonshaped and ruffled petals. The miniature grows no more than six inches high, medium-sizes range from ten to twenty inches, and giants top three feet.

And their colors range from red to pink to lavender; from plum to orange to golden yellow, from white to cream to the palest pastels of all those colors.

Some new zinnia varieties produce blossoms six inches in diameter. Dainty miniatures give countless double flowers, almost spherical, in clear bright colors ideal for borders, edging and, of course, cutting.

The seedbook also offers indoor plants you can grow from seed. There's *Aralia Sieboldi*, an easy-care tropical plant with leathery, deeply-cut leaves. There's *Aralia Elegantissima* resembling the beautiful marijuana plant, though unrelated to it. There's the Umbrella Tree with its remarkably shiny and graceful fronds of foliage topping tall stems in an umbrella fashion.

The seedbook lists over a dozen herbs to grow from seed. The early-American housewife brought herb seeds with her to the New World and started them in a sunny spot handy to her kitchen door. You can do the same with sweet basil, borage, chives and caraway.

You can grow catnip for your puss, dill for your pickles, marjoram for your meatloaf, mint for your tea; you can raise oregano for spaghetti sauce, tarragon to flavor broiled fish, and rosemary, sage and savory for stews, stuffings and chowders.

If you've a rose garden, and if you like the flavor of garlic, you may want to plant garlic among your rose bushes since it's a natural pesticide and discourages aphids, black-spot and mildew. I'm going to try it this coming season.

Growing herbs is a fascinating hobby, and using them adds a gourmet touch to your cooking. Soups, sauces, garnishes, breads, stews, chowders, omelets, roasts, salads, and the plainest of vegetables may all be enhanced by herbs. If you're tired of cooking, serving and eating the same monotonous menus, week after week, try putting some spicy variety into your food with herbs you've raised yourself.

During the growing season, herbs can be cut and added, fresh, to your dishes. Clipping the tips encourages bushy growth, and the tender new leaves are the most delicately flavored.

In late summer you'll want to harvest your herbs and dry them for winter use. Some, such as dill, chives, tarragon, and basil can be successfully frozen if you follow simple directions in the seedbook.

Certain unusual plants are shown to raise from seed; they include ornamental gourds and pampas grass. The gourd vines will grow as long as twelve feet in a season, will cover fences, trellises, or porch railings with dense foliage, and will produce a wide variety of brightly colored, hard-shelled, inedible fruit in fascinating and unusual shapes.

If you harvest the gourds before the first frost, you'll have plenty for table decorations, autumn arrangements, and to give away to friends. Gourds grow almost anywhere but do best in full sun.

Pampas grass, a relative of the plumed ten-foot-tall pampas that grows in marshes on the Cape, is perennial in our mild winters. The narrow showy leaves are delicately tufted and the airy graceful plumes wave and shimmer with every passing breeze. Plant these seeds in a sunny corner and harvest late in summer. Hang upside down in a dry, shady place for a week or so; then use for arrangements.

The seedbook is a dream-book and stays around, at our house, all year. First we dream, then we order; when the seeds come, we reread the directions; at harvest-time we study them again.

And do you know of a book that's a better harbinger of spring?