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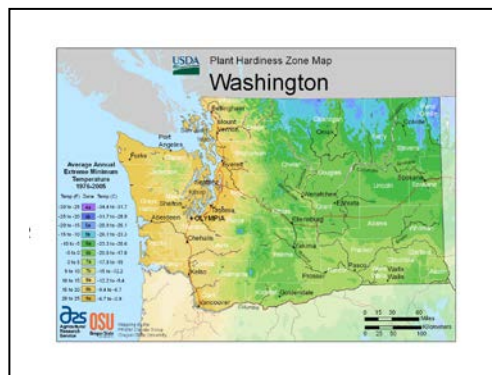
Anticipation!

Mary Davis, WSU Extension Master Gardener

There are two types of catalog anticipation; Christmas catalogs that start coming in August, and seed catalogs that begin arriving in November. I have never been able to decide which one I like the best, but now with teasers of a season change the seed catalogs are winning because they are just plain exciting. Choosing what ‘new’ and ‘improved’ flowers and vegetables to test this next growing season and looking forward to tried and true favorites is part of the joy of gardening.

There are as many styles of catalog as there are companies. The arty drawing or the colorful pictures of healthy plants are both attractive, but there are several things you should look for in their information before you fall for the pretty pictures. Read the description in several catalogs for the same plant that you are considering. Look at the differences and decide what the discrepancies are. If there are differences between the growing days required or the hardiness zone, do further research.

The first thing to consider is your hardiness zone. Catalogs usually have some kind of map included that informs you of your hardiness zone, based on the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map (<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>). You can confirm your zone by visiting the USDA map online and entering your zip code. They also have an ‘interactive’ map that you can use to zoom in on your location. You can fine-tune your hardiness growing level by noting the range of cold temperatures at your location over a few years. That will help you keep up with any changes in our weather patterns. Ferry County has four different hardiness zones based on average annual extreme minimum temperatures 1976 – 2005. If you live on the edges of a zone change, your personal records will help you decide if a plant will survive the winter or if you need to protect it. Compare notes with neighbors that are at roughly the same elevation and have the same local vegetation.



The “days to harvest” or “days to maturity” noted in the description of the plant will help you decide if it will grow and thrive in your garden, but remember that there is a difference between days from sowing the seed to harvest or days after you transplant into your garden to maturity. The description should tell you which number they have calculated. If it does not, look the plant up on the computer to gain more information. This is still a ‘ballpark’ number, as it may not take into consideration the heat units in different zones. Certainly, Ferry County has greater number of heat units than a coastal location. A sunny warm day versus a cool cloudy one changes the rate of growth for a new plant.

The available light in your selected planting location will also be a factor in plant health. If the plant you want is designated as a shade loving plant, it will not grow well if subjected to all day sun. Catalogs vary

in their symbols for light requirements. You should to check their legend for the meaning of the symbols used.

One of the final steps while you are dreaming (planning) your next garden is to remember problems and their solutions from last year's harvest. Questions to ask and form an answer to in your 2017 plan concern watering, spacing, soil amendments, pests you encountered, and above all, what is your level of time and energy you can put into your garden this year. The best tool I have found since I started gardening is my journal. I've found that my ability to remember exactly what I did for a specific plant, area of the garden, or pest response diminishes very rapidly as my garden is put to rest for the winter. It is not until I get the first seed catalog and start dreaming of the upcoming season that I start to wonder what I actually did. The journal of what was planted where and the resulting harvest is just what is needed to plan the New Year. I sometimes include invoices and plant information tags for something new that I tried. In addition, I wait for spring to see if it lived through the winter. There are garden journal templates available free on the internet if you want examples. My spiral bound notebook paper works for me for now.

Above all, plan your garden for enjoyment and to the level of your time and ability. Take time to enjoy all stages of plant growth and you will remember why you started gardening in the first place!

#### References

- How to Read A Seed Catalog, Kathy Wolfe, WSU Extension, Skagit County
- How to Read a Seed Catalog, WSU Extension, Chelan County
- Ordering from Seed Companies and Nursery's, WSU Extension
- How to Read Seed Catalogs. Dr. Leonard Perry, Extension Professor, University of Vermont

To yield more information contact WSU Ferry County Extension Master Gardeners with gardening questions. 509-775-5225, x1116, [jordant@wsu.edu](mailto:jordant@wsu.edu), 350 E. Delaware Ave. #9 Republic, WA 99166 in the basement of the Courthouse. For Extension publications go to <https://pubs.wsu.edu/>.