

# ORDERING SEEDS IN THE SPRING

By K. A. BAIRD

**A** -A-A-A-H! the new seed catalogue has arrived. I will sit down this evening by the fireside and plan what I shall order for my garden. It is only nine o'clock and it is a long evening ahead. Passing over the flowers on both sides of the front cover and ignoring, for the moment, the free rose bush offer and advertisement for soy beans on the envelope in which the catalogue arrived, I glance hurriedly at page three and decide that from the pictures of the office, greenhouses, and nurseries, this Company can probably grow more seeds than I will require this spring, so now to delight my eye with the actual photographs of wonderful and exciting vegetables.

The first one on the list is—how shall I pronounce it? P-o-t-a-t-o-e-s is usually pronounced potatoes but *tomatoes* seems to have about three pronunciations. Many people from New Brunswick and Ontario rhyme them with potatoes. Most Nova Scotians, especially Haligonians, whose language is so under the influence of the British Navy use a much broader *a*; pronouncing the *mat* with a slightly broader *a* than if the three letters were describing a floor covering. Then there are those people who wishing to show that they have entirely departed from their earlier habits of saying *tomato* have so pronounced the *a* that it sounds very much like the *o* in *hot*. You will pardon me if I use any or all of these pronunciations.

As one studies his catalogue he is convinced that it is the work of some party or parties who not only know their vegetables but who know their psychology as well. Consider the very first sentence on page four: "Grow your favorite varieties of Tomatoes from seed, and avoid the disappointment so frequently encountered in buying Tomato plants of unknown, unnamed and frequently unsuitable varieties." Your hitherto unspoken and rather lazy scheme of purchasing ready grown plants is severely shaken by such a thrust as that. I for one certainly do not want my tomatoes to be unknown, unnamed, and frequently unsuitable. I must read on. No. 962 "the earliest and best tomato on earth" sounds quite good enough for me. "While our description was in the most superlative terms, every claim made for it has been generously fulfilled." A footnote

quotes a letter from a man in Woodstock, N. B., whose experience is complete with this variety, but my eyes drop to 953, BIZON, the tomato for northern gardens. "As high as forty pounds of ripe fruit have been produced from one plant." All I need to do then is to plant five or six to get several hundredweight of ripe tomatoes and I can keep the rest of the ten cent package for next year. Then there is 958, COLOSSAL, the largest tomato grown—even larger than the famous Ponderosa. Some have grown COLOSSAL tomatoes weighing four pounds. I wonder if I want four pound tomatoes. But a-a-h! here at last 973; "This epoch-making tomato was developed jointly by the University of Toronto and the Ontario Experimental Station at Vineland." A well educated plant I guess. I do not believe I can decide just now. I will come back to tomatoes again. I turn the page and find there are yellow and white tomatoes, and pepper tomatoes, and orange yellow, none of which interest me now that I know about the one which was educated at the University of Toronto, but on the lower part of this page are Sweet, Pot and Medicinal Herbs. Just listen to some of the names: Anise, Sweet Basil, Caraway, Coriander, Marjoram Sweet, Sage, Summer Savory, Thyme. I must ask my wife if she wants some of them.

On page seven are artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, and brussels sprouts. I do not think I will try to grow any of these so again I turn a page and I am lost in wonder at the photographs of Kentucky Wonder Green Pod Beans. But how can one decide from fifteen varieties of ordinary beans and three varieties of lima beans what he shall purchase in his own small garden especially when they are described in terms such as these: "Deliciously sweet, crisp, and stringless." "Has a distinct fine flavor like that of asparagus." "A magnificent bean and the finest flavored snap bean grown . . . May be planted in with corn and the cornstalks will act as a support." (What a clever thing to start you thinking about corn on page eight, then the corn itself is not described until page fifteen). But here are more descriptions: "Has everything to be desired in quality." "One of the finest beans on earth." "The finest strain of Black Wax Bean." And then the limas: "The largest pod and most prolific of Bush Limas. Even the fully matured beans are delicious." "Also known as "Baby Lima." The earliest lima grown and continues to grow until killed by frost." (Poor baby).

On page ten is the new vegetable soybean, "without equal as a human food, it contains nearly four time as much protein

as wheat, rice or eggs, and twice as much as peas, pork or beef. Its fat content is equal to that of beefsteak and is higher than in pork. It supplies more calories than any other common food, excepting butter." With each order for Early Blackeye one receives a free recipe book. I did not plant my Early Blackeye early enough last year so I did not need a recipe book; but I must try again! Near the bottom of page ten is a little note about tobacco. One ounce of seed which will cost you \$1.50 will produce 5,000 plants. "Grow your own tobacco", says the catalogue, "and have a good supply of pure unadulterated leaf for your own needs." Personally, I am not interested but I cannot understand how after hearing this, you smokers can ever bring yourselves to use the impure, adulterated, un-natural stuff you have been using in the past; at least that is the implication of the catalogue.

Chinese Celery Cabbage is an interesting vegetable. I grew some last year but did not start to eat it early enough, so that some of it went to seed. The catalogue lists two varieties: Chihli (which happens to be the name of a province in North China) and Pe-Tsai, which is labelled a poultry cabbage. But there must be some mistake here, because our cooks in China used to feed us on Pe-tsai all the time. I wonder if the rascals were really laughing up their sleeves and feeding the foreigners henfood!

If in the past you have made the mistake of thinking the carrot was an uninteresting root you should read the poetic descriptions from the catalogue. Let me quote a few. "Beautiful deep golden orange . . . tender and sweet". "Smooth, symmetrical, golden roots, richly colored." "Sweet, tender, and delicious." "Rich orange color." "A fine deep orange throughout." Time does not permit me to linger with you on the cabbage page. Apparently one can take his choice between cabbage that weigh five or six pounds and those that weigh forty pounds.

Most countries in the world today may be off the gold standard but the seed psychologist knows the word still has power to charm and so it is used plentifully on the corn page. Golden cross bantam, golden kernel, golden evergreen, sunshine golden, early golden market, golden bantam and golden gem. The only weakness in this form of advertising it that one is apt to look into the fire and meditate too long on some such subject as "Corn Boils I Have Attended."

There are two and a half pages of cucumbers. Everything from China Long which is two feet in length to the tiny pickling cucumber. Not so much imagination seems to have been used

in naming cucumbers as in some of the other items in the catalogue. Ace, new mandarin, and tax payer are among the most intriguing. I think the last named (No. 695) is a little over done. About all the adv. writer can say about it is that it is destined to become one of our foremost slicing cucumbers, and being a tax payer myself I have a feeling that there is already too much slicing done. It seems to remind me of unpleasant things. I think the seed growers should get together and re-name many of their cucumbers.

Just to brighten the situation pages nineteen and twenty are printed in bright colors, printed in orange, green, bright red, tomato red, blue, black and white. Page nineteen offers a collection of eight easy ways to grow vegetables for fifty cents. The small gardener who has strongly resisted the descriptions and decided that he will just buy his seeds at the corner drug store now decides he will send away his fifty cents to get this sixty eight cent value. It is almost irresistible. Page twenty is nearly filled with four large luscious Bizon Tomatoes (the extra early self pruning tomato for northern gardens). The lower part of the page is taken up with three letters from Debert, N. S., Rawdon, Que., and Alberni, B. C., from grateful growers of Bizon tomatoes.

As I turn the next few pages I decide not to order celtuce, egg plant, dandelion, or leek. I note the catalogue writer has read his bible because he advertises Hawe's fertilizer as 100-fold. The evening grows late and I must hurry on. The page describes various varieties with such words as "excellent quality", "easy grown". The names of some of the melons are very interesting but I am not inclined to order them after my experience last year. Perhaps it was my own fault. Here are some of the names: heart of gold, honey rock or sugar rock, banana musk melon and honey dew. The last name reminds me of those nice little "Wait On Yourself" restaurants in Montreal and Toronto. When I finally make out my list I must include some onions, although I cannot see that much imagination has been used in describing the two full pages of bulbs.

I want to put lots of peas in my garden so stop to note that while Alaska is the earliest pea grown a number of others have many fine qualities. For example one is called the "Little Marvel". The big marvel to me is that the writer managed to describe twelve different varieties in terms which make you think any one of them would be just lovely in your garden, and yet never repeated himself. This leads me to wonder if it would not be a good idea for some of our Universities to employ one

of the seed catalogue writers, if not in the capacity of a full time professor, at least to give a short course on how to use the English language. Before we leave the peas I note that there are also two varieties with edible pods, but I find it hard to choose between Dwarf Gray Sugar and Mammoth Melting Sugar. Parsley, peppers, parsnips and pumpkins; take your choice: they are all there. I do not think I shall plant any Jumbo Pumpkins (No. 881) which often weigh from 100 to 200 pounds. There is a pen and ink sketch at the side showing two exhausted looking men with knees bent and shoulders sagging trying to carry the enlarged pumpkin, about which the two of them together cannot extend their arms completely. My garden is on a side hill and I would be afraid if I grew one of these monsters it might roll down on me or one of my children with resulting tragedy in the family. Pumpkin pies are not worth it! Besides there is a baker right around the corner who makes good ones if I should need them.

There are two or three pages of rather odd looking things. You might be interested in the descriptions. The yard long bean grows sometimes as long as four feet. There is the New Bush Cucumber and the Chinese Salad Bean, from which you can get sprouts to make your own chop suey next winter. There is a variety of peanuts which you can grow in most parts of Canada,—and the *snake cucumber*! The giant madgebury chicory will make an excellent coffee substitute for one cent a pound. With the recent increase in coffee prices I am interested. I am planning to plant some garden huckleberry and a few of the sugar tomatoes. A runnerless strawberry, banana musk melon, and white beauty tomato and vegetable spaghetti about exhausts the list of vegetables. The latter is an import from Persia,—a large gourd-like food,—should be cooked about twenty minutes when one can spill out a dish full of delicious vegetable spaghetti.

Oh! Oh! we are only half through the catalogue. The second half deals with the most beautiful colored flowers, such as I dare not hope to grow, and anyway the clock is striking eleven. It is time to hear the news. I have spent two hours looking over the seed catalogue and have not really ordered a single seed yet. The seed house advised its patrons to order early. I wonder if they defeat their own end by making their catalogue so interesting that the readers become lost in the descriptions and pictures and in imagining the wonderful garden they are going to grow, to such an extent that they keep putting off the actual writing down of their orders, as I have done.