



## I also love seed catalogs!

IVA WALKER

I also love seed catalogs. They're coming in now and probably will continue until Memorial Day; Hope springs eternal!

I used to get lots more. That was before somebody apparently tipped off Burpee's Seeds and Plants, Stark Bros, Gurney's, Johnny's Selected Seeds, Park Seeds, et al. that I had a particularly virulent "black thumb". Yes, sadly, for green things large and small, I am a chlorophylliate "kiss-of-death". Once-upon-a-time, single-handed, I caused the demise of an air fern. Jungle Girl, I am not.

Seed catalogs are so hopeful. One gets the feeling--planted by those wily horticulturists--that if the sun will just come up on a regular basis, fruits and vegetables will overflow all of the containers available for them and the neighbors can rely on your largesse for regular infusions of Vitamins A, B--all of them--C, D and probably E and K.

It's all reminiscent of the early days of settlement in Freedom Township: The proprietors of large tracts of land wished to sell much of it at a profit, so they put it about that this acreage out in the wilds of the Western Reserve was a veritable Eden of the West, where crops would grow with amazing abundance and rapidity. When planting, the sower would have to be nimble about dropping seeds in the ground, lest they spring up and deliver a sharp rap on the chin to anyone lingering to observe them in the ground. These early real estate entrepreneurs neglected to mention the "Great Swamp" in the middle of Portage County (Not connected, but not unlike the Great Black Swamp over in western Ohio which slowed "Mad" Anthony Wayne on his way to the Battle of Fallen Timbers but encouraged the growing of just about every kind of agriculture once the place had been mostly drained.). One lady who had trekked all the way out from Massachusetts expecting to find Paradise; when she got here and saw what she saw, she wrote back to her sister, "If this be the Land of Freedom, I would like to know what the Land of Bondage will be."

Anyway, the same people who come up with the titles for the little sample cards in the paint selection department work on the side coming up with names for new varieties of plants. "Snow Sweet", "Dwarf Wonderblue", "Pinky Winky" (It's a hydrangea), "Serendipity", "Sugar Daddy", "Buttercrunch". Do they sound luscious or what? Then there's "Green Arrow" (green peas), "Mucho Nacho Hybrid" (jalapeno), "Mammoth Sandwich Island" (Salsify... whatever that is), "Kong (as in 'King') Hybrid Sunflower" (12 feet). One of my favorites is the "Firewitch Dianthus", another is "Incrediball Hydrangea". Where do they get these things? Great stuff!

Somehow, I got on a mailing list for Growers Supply--a division of FarmTek. These folks obviously don't know who they're dealing with. They're peddling complete hydroponic systems, Solar Star Greenhouses, E-Z Haul wagons and carts, seedling heat mats and Tex-R Geodiscs for weed control. Whoops! They're touting all of this wonderful stuff to someone who's got beavers chewing down the last, remaining semi-dwarf-goneberserk apple tree in the backyard. Tough sell.

Still, I usually fall for at least one of their blandishments and attempt to make some new green thing grow someplace. Bob the Landscaper Dude will tell you that I will give it the old school try, but our nemesis is shade. I have lots. All of the bright, colorful plants--perennials, I have no truck with namby-pamby vegetation that can't survive on its own--come with directions to plant them in "full sun". Not much of that around here.

The other siren song that I often fall for is the "heritage" label. Makes me think of our orchard at home. Lots of old, old varieties of fruit--Yellow Transparent I remember. Maybe Baldwins? A little yellow plum, about the size of a Bing cherry-- sweet, sweet, sweet--grafted onto a larger plum tree. Birds always got the cherries before any of us could. Calves and chickens and pigs and sheep scarfed up anything that hit the ground.

I do hope that somewhere in a seed bank (Like the one up in Norway on the island of Spitzbergen, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault) or world-wide gene bank all of these "old timers" are just waiting to be rediscovered, re-used, re-purposed and appear again to be enjoyed. Plants need a "Noah's Ark" too, to protect against a loss of diversity, whether by accident or natural disaster or disease. When we get down to just a few varieties--all of our eggs in one basket, if you will--we're just tempting Fate, setting ourselves up for some really hungry times. Funny, isn't it, that perhaps the survival of the vast majority of our food crops may depend on a storage vault 810 mi. from the North Pole, chosen for its lack of tectonic/seismic activity and its permafrost--the place is kept at 0 degrees.

Clarence Birdseye would be proud.



## Puppy Tails

MIALIE T. SZYMANSKI

*As the moon goes to bed,  
the sun comes up  
And here we meet a sleepy pup,  
Who was walking through  
G-ville one bright sunny day,  
Then saw The Villager  
and decided to stay.*

Doodle Dog woke up and went to the window, sleepily tugging on the bottom of the curtain to make the fabric push aside so he could see the beautiful day outside. What a surprise then to find not the sun streaming through the glass and winter birds singing in the new morning, but rather the floppy-eared puppy found himself greeted by nothing but a wall of white smushed up against the window! The ground was undoubtedly covered in a fluffy white blanket, but Doodle Dog couldn't know for sure since snow was piled higher and even higher on the other side of the window, so high in fact that Doodle Dog couldn't see anything on the other side, anything resembling the world he knew was out there. At this very moment, all that existed was the little puppy and the igloo-like inside of the office he called home.

Since Doodle Dog couldn't go outside today, as the second he would walk out the door - if he even COULD open the door - he would certainly find himself at the bottom of a massive mound of melty snowflakes, the floppy-eared puppy decided to make the most of a cozy day spent inside the office.

As he lazily turned away from the window, thinking of what he might do first, Doodle Dog's tail swiped against the swishing curtain. The fabric twisted around the tip of his tail and as he walked away from the window and toward the middle of the room, so then did the curtain go with him, stretching and stretching behind him until... YANK! It came tumbling off the thin rod on top of the window frame and landed right on top of Doodle Dog, covering the little puppy from head to toe in the soft material. Doodle Dog wasn't sure what he could do about it, but he was pretty sure the office staff wouldn't be too happy to find the curtain yanked off the wall. Well, maybe they wouldn't notice...

So Doodle Dog did what any little dog would do and wiggled and wiggled until he could get

himself free from the tangled cloth. He backed up and backed up, wiggling his furry behind to knock the curtain off his body but his head was still covered so he couldn't see where he was going! Soon the determined puppy came loose from the heavy curtain. Success! But just as it dropped to the floor, the edge of the rug Doodle Dog was standing upon curled up and caught one of his paws. The little floppy-eared puppy tilted this way and that as his paws tripped over the small rug. Before he knew it, the rug rolled right over on top of him, and Doodle Dog was rolling across the floor in it, a colorful twisting fuzzy bug in a rug if there ever was one! Finally the rug had nowhere else to roll and it stopped SMACK against something very hard in the middle of the room. Something very hard, very large, and very important... the main work desk with all of its important work things on top! As the rug unrolled with Doodle Dog unrolling right out of it, the little floppy-eared puppy crashed into the wooden desk in the middle of the room. The desk moved ever so slightly, but the pencil cup on top of the desk moved quite a bit more than just slightly, and was knocked off the table. The pencils skittered across the floor, rolling under this drawer and that cabinet, until every last one played a part in the mess that was slowly being made for the office staff to find. Well, maybe they wouldn't notice...

The pencils continued skittering and rolling into the various corners and crevices around the office furniture, and one landed right where Doodle Dog's toys are kept. He couldn't help but want to run after and play with them all - he may as well have some fun! But as Doodle Dog excitedly scampered in search of his collection of chewy bones and tug-rope toys, he ran past the desk so fast that the breeze left behind

him lifted up all the papers that had been held in place by the pencil cup... and they were promptly scattered to the wind, all over the room! Well, maybe they wouldn't notice that either...

The flying papers distracted Doodle Dog from his quest to find his toys, as the various airborne documents in all shapes and sizes and bright colors floating around the room reminded Doodle Dog of the leaves he loves to chase. His chewy bone momentarily forgotten, the little floppy-eared puppy leapt through the air, trying to catch one of the smaller papers in his mouth... Got one! And as he did, Doodle Dog crashed into the nearby bookcase with a THUD! Doodle Dog scooted out of the way just as the bookcase tipped over, spilling all of the books into a jumbled pile on the floor where the rug had once been. Well, maybe they wouldn't notice...

But Doodle Dog noticed the beautiful pictures on the covers of the books, each one reminding him of the story he knew must be inside. Stories he'd heard many times before, and stories he thought of as he glanced at each cover. There was the one with a very tall tower with a rope of golden hair - Doodle Dog knew a princess lived way up there. Another cover had a horse with a brave knight - Doodle Dog knew that story would end with a fight. And as he thought of all the bedtime stories, the little floppy-eared puppy grew sleepier and sleepier and thought now would be a good time for a nap and for dreaming. So he tucked into his cozy bed... If he curled under his blankets deep enough, well, maybe they wouldn't notice...



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