

Van Hage Garden Article

Seeds 'New Varieties for 2008'

Experience the magic of growing from seed and be the first to try out some of this year's new and exciting varieties – exclusively available in packets.

With a world of possibilities awaiting discovery, growing from seed gives a feeling of incomparable satisfaction, plus great value plants to suit every situation.

So take this opportunity to plan your garden for the year ahead and cram it full of tempting varieties, totally new for 2008.

And if you're committed to growing your own vegetables, than a search through perhaps one of the largest new seed ranges, is sure to yield a mouth-watering harvest.

Antirrhinum 'Chuckles' A spectacular mix of bicoloured 'snapdragons' that's certain to put a smile on your face. Ideal for beds, borders and patio containers, and excellent for cutting too! Height 45cm (18").

If soft and subtle is more your style, try Aster 'Bridesmaids' to fit the bill. An 'incurved' petal variety that's a unique pastel blend of apple blossom, chamois and delicate off-white shades, held on multi-branching bushy plants, with stems strong enough for cutting. This latest twist on a popular half-hardy annual may be sown from March to May under glass for earlier flowers, or direct-sown out of doors during April and May to flower 'til the end of October.

Familiar as a dried flower, but rarely seen fresh, **Carthamus 'Bon Bons'** will set alight your borders with a mass of fluffy flowers in vibrant shades of orange, yellow and white. Unlike some varieties, it is thornless, making a superb cut flower – a drought-resistant hardy annual for sun. Height 60-80cm (24-32").

End your search for the exotic with **Godetia 'Poppet'** and **Godetia 'Sugarplum'** - two gorgeous new varieties whose tropical-looking blooms are a combination of orchid pink and deep carmine rose. Their single flowers resemble poppies while their semi-double and double blooms are prettily frilled. Ideal for beds and borders, this hardy or half-hardy annual may be sown in-situ to flower from July to September.

Back again to the bold colours, **Nasturtium 'Paintbox'** boasts one of the best pallet ranges of any packet nasturtium. With its compact habit and edible flowers held well above the foliage, 'Paintbox' is ideal for beds, borders, patio tubs and containers. Happiest in free-draining soil and a sunny position, like the rest of the nasturtium family, it's superbly drought-resistant. They can also be used to cover banks, fences and hedges, or allowed to trail from hanging baskets as a natty trailing plant.

Once considered the 'poor man's orchid', old-fashioned favourite **Schizanthus** has been transformed into the 'butterfly flower' of today, decorated with exotic markings set against attractively cut foliage. New **'Angel Wings'** makes bushy plants, perfect for a small border or pretty patio tub. Unusual, attractive and versatile too, half-hardy **Schizanthus** may also be grown as a spring pot plant in an unheated greenhouse. Height 30-38cm (12-15").

Taller still and just as welcoming to butterflies, Sunflower 'Total Eclipse' is a unique blend of two of the most popular contrasting shades. A velvety deep bronze red with dark leaves and a pale soft yellow set against light leaves – both will branch and spread up to 80cm. Height 50-60cm (20-24"). A real favourite with children, the flowers, like very large daisies with brightly coloured petals may be eaten – use both petals and seeds in salads and cakes.

Delicious as purple beetroot, but with no fear of staining, Beetroot 'Yellow Cylindrical' is a new, yellow-skinned tasty crop, of high quality and crisp white flesh. Rich in potassium and folate, plus vitamin C - roots are known to improve the body's immune system, while the young leaves may also be used as spinach.

Another unique colour and hot, hot, hot! – Chilli 'Peach Habanero' grows into compact young plants for the kitchen windowsill or patio garden, for a spicy harvest of 5-6cm (2-2½") long fruits.

Topping the taste tests, Tomato 'Faworyt' is a new compact-growing beefsteak, with exceptionally large fruits up to 0.4kg (14oz) in weight. The pink flesh is particularly delicious and contains few seeds, while plants may be grown outside or under glass.

Just as 'Fun-to-Grow', new blister packs designed for children are the ideal introduction for sowing and growing a generation of new gardeners. Character-based packets feature educationally raised 'fun facts', including fascinating information on the origins of plants and how they are used. From 'Flower Bunch' – grow your own cut flowers, to 'Giant Pumpkins' and 'Healthy Veg' – 'The Great Sunflower Race' to 'Jack and the Beanstalk', there's no end to the fun little people can have!

IN THE GARDEN THIS WEEK...

- Dust off the propagator and get sowing! Seed stocks are at their fullest, so choose from the best new varieties and time-honoured favourites for a garden brimming with colour in 2008!
- Mild temperatures will encourage the grass to start growing. Worn patches will quickly repair if aerated and rested for a time, as the spring flush takes effect.
- If you missed buying shallots and garlic last autumn, take comfort – stocks are back on the shelves, ready for early season planting.
- Dwarf Iris are the dainties of the potted bulbs – perfect miniatures of their taller summer cousins and often sweetly scented. Available in midnight blues, purples and sunshine yellow, they grow to just 7-15 cm 3-6" in height.