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## **Buy Garden Supplies Locally When You Can**

The “seed” catalogues will be arriving soon. If you are a serious gardener and have ever ordered anything horticulturally related, you are likely on a mailing list. These publications tempt even the most cynical gardener with images of bountiful crops of vegetables and landscapes overflowing with colorful flowers.

This is the best time of year to peruse seed catalogues and make plans for spring planting. Though the seeds, plants, equipment and other supplies offered are often of high quality, make purchases locally when possible.

There are several advantages to buying garden supplies from a garden center or nursery in your community. Obviously, some portion of the profits from these purchases are returned to the local economy.

Shopping at home offers several other advantages. First, many garden center and nursery employees live and garden in the community and are in a position to offer localized gardening advice. An increasing number of these representatives are also being better trained to assist customers.

One of the keys to success in any landscape is the “right plant in the right place,” or the use of a plant or groupings that are well adapted to specific areas within a given landscape. Here the local supplier can be of help by knowing the area, and in some cases, might even be familiar with your neighborhood.

Local garden centers and nurseries often purchase plants from wholesale suppliers within our geographical area. This is often an advantage because a shrub, tree or other plant propagated from local stock is more likely to be adapted to Gulf Coast conditions.

A red maple, for example, from a nursery up north is not exactly like a red maple grown from the seed of the same species from a northwest Florida source. There is a difference at the cellular level - there are different biotypes that are adapted to specific

weather conditions within each region.

Some local suppliers also offer bulk seed of the most popular vegetables. A few that I am familiar with even stock some of the old timey, or heritage varieties. Call me sentimental, but I still like the idea of choosing from a bulk bin and having my vegetable seeds scooped and weighed to order.

Finally, and equally important, is the personal touch that a nearby nursery or garden center can offer. If there are questions about plants or supplies that were purchased you can usually talk with someone familiar with the transaction.

My seed catalogues will probably be dog-eared from use by spring, but I'll buy most supplies locally. I did however, see a new flower variety that's worth a try, and that new pruner, that special shovel and .....

**Question of the Week:** I didn't know that winters could be so cold in Northwest Florida! All of my tender potted plants have been stored for several weeks and are beginning to look poorly. How long can they tolerate conditions in my garage, and is there anything that I can do to keep them healthy?

**Answer:** You were wise to bring in any tender patio plants. Though protected from freezing, they will suffer to some degree during storage because of limited light and the danger of drying out, unless watered.

Move them outside during warm periods, irrigate thoroughly and allow excess water to drain from the pots before moving them back indoors. Though they will look rough by spring, most will recover quickly when they can be safely moved back outside.