

# Mail Order

*Discover a world of plants.*

The first time I ordered plants from a catalog, I didn't know what to expect. I'd ordered clothes before, but shipping a rose seemed like a far cry from mailing a sweater. Turns out, it's much the same once you find a reputable company that meets your needs. Even if you buy many of your plants from local garden centers, the mail-order catalogs supply a lot of plant varieties that you won't find anywhere else. But there are a few tips that will help you navigate the waters of ordering seeds and plants from catalogs.



## Seeds

If you're thinking about mail-order gardening, seeds are a good place to start. First, check the descriptive copy in the catalog for the quantity of seeds. Single packets are usually sold by the number of seeds. The description of the moss rose, or portulaca, above shows that it contains 25 seeds. For larger quantities, you can order more packets — but first give the folks at the catalog a call. They may have bulk quantities at a lower price.

Look a little closer at the catalog entry, and you'll see that the seeds are *pelleted*, or coated with an inert substance to make them larger and easier to handle. You'll sometimes find this with tiny seeds, such





**▲ Why order pelleted seed?** Companies often pelletize small seeds, like these moss rose, so they're easier to handle.

as petunias, pentas and the moss rose in photo 1. See how much easier it would be to pick up the yellow-coated ones? The coating doesn't affect germination and dissolves with the first watering.



**▲ Trim bareroot plants' roots** right before planting to stimulate new growth. Then soak them for a few hours.



### Potted plants

The Russian sage entry above says that it comes in a 3-inch pot. Perennials and annuals are also sold in flats, 4- or 6-packs, and gallon-size pots or larger. Another place to check for plant size is near the front of the catalog — many have a coding system to describe plant size and the shipping method. Sometimes they're wrapped in plastic, cardboard tubes or even newspaper. Whatever you order, look for a healthy root system that fills the container.

In early spring, your potted plant may be dormant, so you'll just see the remnant of last year's growth sticking out of the soil. Unpack it immediately and give it a drink of water. It's ready to plant when you are.

Plants ordered in late spring or the fall might have broken dormancy and started to grow like those in photo 3. They'll need watering as well, but before planting them outside, harden them off once the new



**▲ A potted plant will need a little TLC** when it arrives. Unpack it immediately and place it in filtered light. A good watering will settle the roots back into the soil and add moisture to the plant.

growth is tender. Do this by setting them outside in filtered shade a few hours each day for about a week.

Most companies ship plants in fall and spring and stop when the weather turns too hot or cold. Ordering early means your plants will arrive at the best planting time in your zone — and you'll have a better chance of getting your first choices.

We guarantee all the products offered in this catalog for one year from delivery. Of course, garden success depends largely on weather, soil, and proper care by the gardener. If you take good care and are not satisfied with the results, notify us within a year, and we will gladly replace your losses to the extent possible. If replacement is not available or suitable, we will send full credit or refund.

### This end up

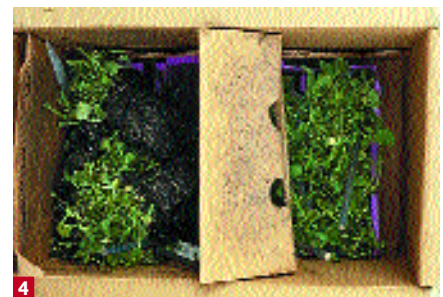
Occasionally you might get a shipment that arrives damaged, like the order of pansies in photo 4. It's disappointing to find your plants like this, especially when you're ready to garden. You can alleviate some of the hassle by asking about the replacement policy when you order. You'll also want to find out what to do with the damaged plant. Some companies may want the plant as proof, but most won't. In the entry above, this company has a one-year replacement guarantee. Plants that arrive in poor condition are covered by this. Most of the time you'll find that the staff at the mail-order company will be more than accommodating. One idea is to take a snapshot of the order when it arrives in case questions arise.

Although it's a little intimidating at first, ordering plants through the mail can be rewarding. What's exciting is when you find a company whose products, people and services meet your needs. Then you know you can count on them year after year. □

### Names to know

Your guide to the common and botanical names of plants on these pages

- Moss rose**  
*Portulaca grandiflora*
- Pansy**  
*Viola xwittrockiana*
- Pentas**  
*Pentas lanceolata*
- Petunia**  
*Petunia xhybrida*
- Rose** *Rosa* spp.
- Russian sage**  
*Perovskia atriplicifolia*



**▲ Damaged shipments don't happen often**, but once in a while plants arrive broken or out of their pots. Call the company — a reputable one will work with you to get the problem resolved.

ALL EXCERPTS COURTESY PARK SEED

45156 Paul's Himalayan Musk. Incredible color and intoxicating scent! Not for the faint of heart, this spectacular rose grows to 30 feet, with a trailing habit that makes it ideal to climb trees. The blooms appear in huge, hanging sprays of fully double, 1 1/2 inch, bluish-pink rosettes resembling cherry blossoms. Small oval red hips follow the flowers. Introduced in the 19th century by Paul of Cheshunt, England. Zones 4-9. **Bareroot Plants: \$12.95 each; 3 for \$31.95. 6 for \$51.95. 12 for \$119.00**

### Bareroot plants

If the word "bareroot" conjures up a picture of naked roots, you're right on. Like the rose in the entry above, many perennials, shrubs and trees are sent this way. The stock is packaged in a cardboard box or a bag with a small amount of moist wood shavings or peat moss. It'll be dormant when you get it, so it might look dead, but it's probably not. A healthy plant has flexible stems, firm, smooth bark and moist roots. If it's dead, the branches and roots will be dry and snap off easily.

Just as with any order, you'll want to care for bareroot plants right away when they arrive. Open the box and check the packing list to ensure your order is what you expected. Prune back any broken roots and those that are much longer than the rest, like I'm doing in photo 2. If you plan on planting right away, soak the roots in a bucket of water for a few hours to get them ready for planting. Then plant them in your garden just as you would any shrub or perennial. Be sure to keep your new plants moist. If you're not ready to plant, just soak the roots and then pot them up with some good potting soil. Keep them well-watered and in filtered light until you can get out to plant.