

## *NORM'S NOTES*

### Seed Suggestions for 2006

First, a few general notes regarding growing from seed. Except for connoisseurs of unusual plants, you really should not need to start seed indoors. There are so many hardy choices of flowers, and to a lesser extent vegetables, for a Montana climate that the extra work needed to germinate tender seed indoors is usually unnecessary. If you have to "baby" a plant, it is usually a poor choice for our climate. Secondly, for flowers you should only have to spend the money once for seed. A well selected plant should be able to mature quickly enough to propagate seed for another year. Importantly, when seeding outdoors and very lightly covering the seed with a thin layer of fine soil, **keep the surface moist at all times** until the plants germinate. Not doing this is the most common cause of seed failure. Remember too that the plant height mentioned in seed catalogs is usually an exaggeration for our cool climate. When selecting seed, do not rely on the veracity of catalog descriptions. Have one or two other reference books that will give more accurate information and more detailed growing requirements. Lastly, avoid mixtures of seed. They are usually a mix of tall and short plants, annuals and perennials, self seeders and plants that will never produce seed in our brief growing season, and a cacophony of seedlings that for many are indistinguishable from weeds ... in short a mix of incompatibility.

Not surprisingly, the British seed company, Thompson and Morgan, gives the most exciting new offerings ... both on the back inside cover: *Viscaria occulata* and Chinese Forget-me-not. Both are a mere 99 cents. And for Montana both must be seeded as soon as the soil is workable (usually late March or early April) in order for the plants to both bloom and set seed. Neither of what used to be these common selections have been available for decades. Also, this year after a long absence *Silene occulata* "Ruby flax" (page 128) which is the selected red variety of the above mentioned *Viscaria occulata* is again available. The seed of *Silene* or *Viscaria* (a confusion in genera classification) must be collected in autumn since the seed usually doesn't survive a Montana winter. Though not as true for Chinese Forget-me-not, fall seed collection is recommended for the first generation. The *Silene* or *Viscaria* mentioned really does look like a pink or red flax, though shorter and with somewhat smaller flowers and a later bloom season. The Chinese Forget-me-not is a 12 inch late summer blooming annual rather than the "true" Forget-me-not biennial 5 inch spring blooming *Myosotis sylvatica*.

Thompson and Morgan again after periodic absences is offering *Clarkia puchella* (page 66) a western Montana and northern Idaho native. This five week blooming, self-seeding annual that has been losing its native habitat, is one of our few native plants that is an excellent ornamental garden flower.

Park's Seeds offers *Dianthus barbatus* "Amazon neon" (page 44) which is a selected Sweet William. Though sometimes seen in Sweet William mixtures, this is the first I've seen it offered as a single variety. Unlike the catalog description, the plant is a biennial that should be loosely seeded in the spring or early summer to bloom the following year. The pictured "Rose magic" had a somewhat lighter combination of pink flowers than the magenta combination in "Duo".

Not a fan of most seed catalogs that clutter my mailbox every year, recommended are Seed Savers Exchange especially for their ornamental lettuces that are excellent edible choices for borders in flower gardens (check out "Red velvet", "Mascara" and "Rossimo"), along with the seldom offered *Xeranthemum annuum*, the best strawflower that can be grown in Montana from flower to seed (page 73).

Wildseed Farms has several inexpensive varieties easily grown in Montana, and especially useful for a novice gardener. But, again, avoid their seed mixtures.

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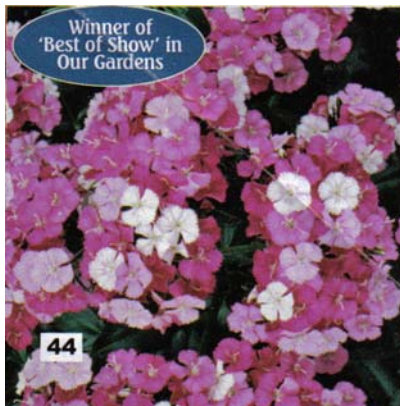
Thompson and Morgan: 1-800-274-7333; [www.thompson-morgan.com](http://www.thompson-morgan.com)  
Park's Seeds, 1-800-845-3369; [www.parkseed.com](http://www.parkseed.com)  
Seed Savers Exchange, 563-382-5990; [www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)  
Wildseed Farms, 1-800-848-0078; [www.wildseedfarms.com](http://www.wildseedfarms.com)



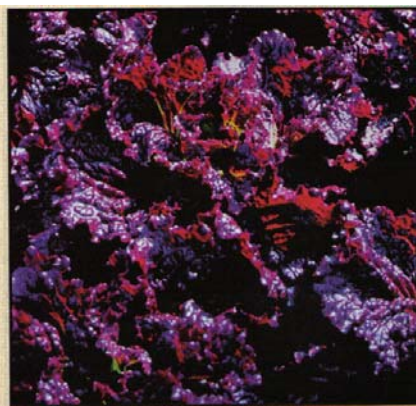
Chinese Forget-me-not

*Viscaria occulta*

*Silene viscaria*



Sweet William "Rose magic"



Lettuce "Red velvet"



Lettuce "Rossimo"



Lettuce "Mascara"



*Xeranthemum annuum*