

With another month until the shortest day of the year and the technical beginning of winter, some signs of the season after that are already making themselves known. In the past, garden seed catalogs appeared in the mailbox in January, and by February first, we had usually made our selections and placed an order with our favorite seed company.

Then, a few years ago, the timing for seed catalog arrival changed. First, we began to receive them just before Christmas. But, this year, our seed catalogs came before Thanksgiving.

So, even though the freezer is still full of vegetables from last summer's efforts, I am deep in decision making concerning what we are going to plant in the vegetable garden next spring.

This is not an unpleasant task. Like the man in an old book I read and re-read every now and then, I start by noting all the seeds I would *like* to order. But, then, common sense takes over, and I think about the space we have, what we need most to grow, the cost, and how much area will be left for optional crops, for those vegetables and herbs we don't need but would like to try.

In the end, we make our usual order plus seeds for a few crops that seem interesting and fun to try. Since the seed catalog came so early this year, I have already perused it and circled what we will need to order. And, along the way, I let my imagination wander through the "new to us" vegetables and choose just a few that would provide the "untried" and the "interesting" for our garden.

Purple Moon cauliflower is described as a perfect complement to an early white like Charming Snow, the regular cauliflower we grow every year. We will try this purple variety. We also raise a green cauliflower, and the three colors should make a beautiful vegetable platter next fall.

The Shintokiwa cucumber looks intriguing. Described as crisp, sweet, and juicy without bitterness, this cucumber likes being trellised. We will try them in the greenhouse.

We will try Anuenue lettuce. This promises to be a dark green lettuce that grows very slowly and is tasty in the hot late summer, never taking on the bitterness that most lettuces exhibit in the heat.

Before I finally get the seed order ready to send to Fedco in Maine, I may weaken in my determination to keep the cost of seeds as low as possible. If that happens, there may well be a few more new-to-us vegetable varieties in our order. In the meantime, we

hope for a good, snowy winter in defiance of El Nino.