

FROM THE EDITOR

Hello again, and welcome to the Spring issue of Cornucopia.

Have you ever been seduced into buying a plant which turned out not to be quite what it seemed? Something happened the other day which prompted me to muse on the synthetic practices of commercial nurseries. I was trolleying past the pot plant section of my local super-market, when my eye was drawn by the unlikely sight of an electric-blue phalaenopsis. I saw it as an abomination, knowing that it was a gilding of the lily - the result of injecting dye into the stems - but when I reached the checkout, I noticed a customer in the adjacent aisle handing one of the vivid blue orchids to the cashier. 'Lovely colour', she remarked. 'Yes, I hope she likes it,' he replied. I realised that, to them, this was just a colourful flower like any other (although his beloved might be in for a shock if it ever flowered again, as it would be un-dyed white).



The artificial coloration of plants reminds me of the three playing-card gardeners in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, painting white roses red for fear that the Queen of Hearts would discover they had planted the wrong colour: 'Off with their heads!' And yet, should I be so puritanical? Are we not all beguiled from time to time by new varieties of plants, often bred artificially, and is not gardening itself a contrived activity, based on the control and design of nature? Where should the artifice end? Perhaps, when I see those lurid little heathers dyed all the colours of the rainbow on the benches at the garden centre, I should forget my prejudices and embrace the idea that they attract more people into gardening, and therefore deserve to be welcomed. Between gritted teeth.

Having said that, a plant which isn't 'real' may ultimately deter the novice gardener; the grafted red cactus on the green cactus base, for example, will grow to become unsustainably top-heavy fairly quickly. Years ago, when I was a garden centre assistant, there was a fad for cacti with mini paper flowers glued onto them. One baffled customer brought one back many months later, asking why the flowers had lasted for over a year. As cacti are often amongst the first plants to be grown by children, that particular form of chicanery seems rather unscrupulous.

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