When Dean asked me to explain the appeal of these gardens and plants today, I told him that grandmother’s gardens “emphasized an appreciation for plants as plants, not just blobs of color,” and they offered “a connection with the real world, which I think is an important part of gardening for many of us today. Hardscaping and backyard kitchens do little to connect us with nature, but working with plants does – which is something I learned from my grandmother.”

Blooming Now:  
The National Collection of Hyacinths on YouTube

With his open house last month cancelled due to Covid-19, our good friend Alan Shipp has posted a short video-tour of his hyacinth fields on YouTube.

Although the eight-and-a-half-minute clip is more of a home-movie than a polished production, it’s a treat to see Alan – who’s been called “the Noah of hyacinths” – walking through his endless rows of hyacinths and chatting about this variety and that almost as if they were his grandchildren.

You can walk with him here – and then if you’re feeling inspired, check out the 14 hyacinths we’re offering now for delivery this fall, and stay tuned for more to follow this summer from Noah himself.

For More Beautiful Daffodils Next Year, Start Now

Here are three simple tips for right now that will help make your daffodils even more beautiful next year.

Writing in Maine’s Camden Herald, our good customer Lynette Walther says first of all plant more daffodils — but where, and how do you remember those spots at planting time months from now?

“Cut some weatherproof markers from plastic yogurt containers or something that can be used to mark the bald spots where a clump of daffodils would look great next spring,” she advises.
“Insert a marker in each sunny, well-drained spot, deep enough so that it will remain there all summer. Come fall when you’ve cleaned out the flower bed or border or wherever your markers lie, that is where you will rediscover them,” and you’ll know exactly where to plant your bulbs.

Then in a tip she calls her “crabby comment of the week,” Lynette says “Yes, everyone knows that after they are finished blooming, the daffodil foliage that is left behind is a mess. But don’t be tempted to cut it off, and for the love of all things good, don’t be tempted to braid or twist or whatever it is you are compelled to do in an attempt to tidy it up. That tatty foliage is performing an important job, working to store enough energy in that bulb down below to enable it to bloom again next spring. So, hands off!”

Finally, Lynette writes, “Looking for some tried and true bulb selections? Visit the Old House Gardens website for a selection of trusted daffodil varieties.”

Good advice all around, we’d say!

Now Online: A Paradise of Historic Iris Catalogs

If you enjoy paging through the latest garden catalogs and daydreaming about all the plants you’d like to add to your garden, how about trying it with catalogs that are 50, 100, or even 200 years old?

Thanks to several dedicated members of the Historic Iris Preservation Society, catalogs in the HIPS archives are being scanned and posted online along with others from the Biodiversity Heritage Library.

The oldest catalog in the Hager-DuBose Memorial Library is the 1807 list of the pioneering American botanists John and William Bartram. Although irises are only a small part of its offerings, it includes several North American native iris as well as “exotic” varieties such as Florentina and Germanica. (Although we won’t offer these two again until next year, 11 other fabulous old iris are available now for delivery next month.)

The library’s oldest iris-only catalog is the 1915 catalog of Dean Iris Gardens and it also includes several of the earliest catalogs of Bertrand Farr such as the one from 1910 pictured here. Farr was America’s first important iris breeder and the person who did more than anyone else to popularize iris (and daylilies) in the US.

Scores of other iris catalogs follow, all organized by date, and many are richly illustrated. It’s a garden-daydreamers paradise. Enjoy!