

Nursery Catalog Art Flowers on New Issue

The Botanical Art stamp First Day of Issue ceremony was held on January 29 at 11 a.m. at the American Philatelic Society's AmeriStamp show, held in Atlanta this year in conjunction with the Southeastern Stamp Expo.

The Botanical Art booklet of 20 stamps featuring vintage illustrations taken from 19th- and early-20th-century plant and seed catalogs continues the USPS tradition of floral-themed stamps that are popular with mailers.

Beginning in the late 15th century, Europeans explored new lands in the Americas, the South Pacific, and other areas of the world. There they discovered plants unknown in Europe, which they imported for study and propagation. Scientists, gardeners, plant hunters, and collectors required accurate botanical drawings of the exotic new species. Botanical illustrators produced works that were meticulous and highly detailed and quite often beautiful pieces of art as well. The years 1750 to 1850 are considered the height of the botanical illustrator's art.

The mid-19th century saw a flowering of another kind of botanical art. As more people discovered the joys of ornamental and recreational gardening, thriving commercial greenhouses and nurseries marketed plants—exotic as well as native—to eager gardeners. To entice buyers, the nurseries created colorful catalogs illustrated with beautiful blossoms and lush foliage. The illustrations were idealized, romantic



versions of what plants could look like, but they fueled many a garden dream.

The Botanical Art stamps feature ten individual designs, each a detail of an illustration from an American nursery catalog printed between 1891 and 1912. The catalogs are part of The New York Botanical Garden's Nursery and Seed Catalog Collection, one of the largest and most important collections in the U.S. The NYBG Collection, and similar collections in other institutions, are treasure troves of historical information for scholars and scientists studying a wide range of subjects, including the history of botany, horticulture, commercial agriculture, landscape design, plant exploration, graphic arts, and publishing.