

TheCount 149 Number of Botanical Interests Inc. seed packets illustrated by Carolyn Crawford

1 Number of Crawford's cats featured on the Cat Grass seed packet

1996 The year Botanical Interests hired Crawford to its team of artists

YouOughtaKnow» Carolyn Crawford, botanical artist



She's drawn to plants

Botanical artist Carolyn Crawford started drawing illustrations of the plant world in 1981. Shortly afterward, the Denver Botanic Gardens featured her work in an exhibit. At first, she used pastel pencils for her work, then switched to watercolor pencils. Now she uses garden-variety colored pencils. *Claire Martin, The Denver Post*

Q: How did you get into illustrating seed packets?

A: I saw one of Botanical Interests' seed packs on a rack, and I knew the artist credited on the back. Then my friend Jackie McFarland, who's been with Botanical Interests for years, called me up and brought me on board. I have always loved plants.

Q: Even as a child?

A: I remember going to Humphrey's mercantile in Grand Lake and buying a Rocky Mountain wildflower guide. I was 10. I carried that everywhere, really looking at wildflowers and drawing them. At one point, a woman looked at what I was doing and told me, "You're a taxonomist." And I said, "I am?"

Q: A what?

A: It's how you scientifically classify something. My feeling has always been that you need to draw plants accurately and in the proper scale. Sometimes that means taking a portion of the planet and enlarging it, like the seed or the petal. A great thing is to be the one who does the original description of a new plant.

Q: Have you had that privilege?

A: Yes! I did the original description of *Platanthera tescamnis*, an orchid that's native to Colorado. The original description has all the Latin terminology. It's very technical.



Q: There's an orchid native to Colorado?

A: You can find them up at the Eagle rest stop, off I-70. It's a terrestrial orchid. Colorado has several of them.

Q: I understand one of your cats is featured on the Cat Grass seed packet.

A: Yes, my old cat, Falcor. I adopted him and used him as a model.

Q: What do you do when you have to illustrate something that's not in season?

A: I keep a notebook of slides of flowers and vegetables, anticipating that. Sometimes I'll go to the store and buy vegetables. For the Bull's Blood beets, I bought some beets at Whole Foods, but I had to extrapolate what red leaves would look like, because my beets' leaves were green.

Q: Bull's Blood beet leaves are red?

A: Yes. And it's hard to make beets look nice, so I tied them up with a pretty ribbon and took a digital picture, scanned it and got to work.

Carolyn Crawford is a botanical illustrator who does most of the seed covers for Botanical Interests in Broomfield. Above left: Black Pearl pepper. Above right: Bull's Blood beets.

Photos by Judy DeHaas, The Denver Post

Q: Do you keep a garden?

A: For me, it's one or the other. I can do botanical art or I can keep a garden, but I can't do both. My gardening is hit-and-miss. My front flower bed is chock-full of perennials, and that's about the extent of it.

Q: Do you grow any of the plants you've illustrated on seed packets?

A: One of the perennials is the Chocolate Flower, *Berlandiera lyrata*. When it opens up first thing in the morning, oh, my gosh! It really smells like chocolate.



Shayna Lashway, Internet marketing manager of Botanical Interests, picks a packet of seeds out of its container to mail to a customer. Botanical illustrator Carolyn Crawford creates most of the seed covers for the Broomfield company.

Certified botanical illustrators must complete an exacting 13-course curriculum, including botany, composition and separate courses in pencil, watercolor paint and colored pencils.

"Botanical illustration is a hybrid between art and science," says Mervi Hjelmoors-Koski, who runs the botanical illustration certification program at Denver Botanic Gardens.

"This has been used for centuries to describe plants, even after photography was invented. You cannot show, in a photo, all the details that you can in an illustration."

Since its certification program began 20 years ago, it's produced about 400 botanical artists. Their backgrounds range from artists to engineers and physicians.

"We get international students here," Hjelmoors-Koski says.

"This technique is exactly the same all over the globe."

Claire Martin, The Denver Post