



Holiday Gifts for Gardeners

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

This past year has seen a tremendous increase in gardening activities ranging from planting or extending vegetable beds, to establishing pollinator gardens, setting out a few fruit trees, improving the lawn, or brightening indoor living spaces with a few houseplants. Plants kept many of us grounded during trying times and hopefully will continue to do so. Keep your gardener family members or friends on the right track with gardening themed holiday gifts.

One item I seem to always be in short supply of is gardening gloves. Options abound but two that I find most compatible with my activities are Foxgloves (\$35), which are thin yet super durable and available in bright colors so they are easy to spot, and Mud Gloves (\$7), waterproof and perfect for rainy springs.

Next on my list is a good kneeling pad. I found the perfect one in Scotland a few years ago and managed to stuff it into my suitcase for the flight home. Then I found the same brand for sale here. Check out the Kneelo Kneeler (\$30) at www.burpee.com or at other sources. Three years so far and this nicely padded, oval kneeler is still holding up fine.

As my gardens age (along with me), plants increase in size and it gets tougher to divide them. Just the job for the Root Assassin shovel (\$50) with its sharp, serrated edges. It comes in two sizes, but I find the smaller is best for tight spaces. Look for it at garden centers or your local farmers co-op.

Vegetable gardeners might appreciate a gift certificate to Baker's Creek Heirloom Seeds (www.rareseeds.com), one of Connecticut's local seed companies and a purveyor of a fine assortment of heirloom vegetable and flower seeds. Antique flower lovers may want to check out the fabulous selection of old-fashioned and heirloom varieties offered by another CT seed house, Select Seeds (www.selectseeds.com).

Both beginning or advanced gardeners will find interesting articles in two Connecticut based magazines. Connecticut Gardener comes out 5 times a year and can be received in print or online. Articles are often written by outstanding CT plant's people and researchers. Plus, they

have an extensive calendar section of local garden related events and happenings. Fine Gardening (www.finegardening.com) features 6 issues filled with exciting plants, intriguing landscapes and places that sometimes in the future we can visit.

Two hefty books on houseplants that have been released over the last few years that might serve as a resource especially for those new to houseplant husbandry are Houseplants: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Growing and Caring for Indoor Plants by Lisa Eldred Steinkopf and Houseplant Handbook by David Squire. Both are healthy tomes with plenty of pictures and lots of advice. Another suggestion for vegetable gardeners interested in heirloom and open-pollinated varieties along with information on the pure food movement is the Whole Seed Catalog (\$12.50). Order online or see if your favorite bookstore sells copies.

I use an old 5 gallon bucket for toting around garden tools, seeds, tomato ties and the like, but I may trade it in for a Puddle Proof Tote (\$50 from www.gardeners.com). My low-lying beds are almost always wet in the spring and this multi-pocketed tote has a waterproof rubber bottom.

If one or more gardeners in your household has mobility issues, perhaps you could purchase or build elevated raised beds. Legs hold the raised beds a few feet off the ground so that plants can be tended to while standing. One can even put wheels on them for ease of moving or storing. Premade kits come in various sizes, but they could be made to fit any space. If this is a larger undertaking or expense than desired, consider porch railing planters. I used to fill my mother's with cheery marigolds along with parsley and other herbs. Even with her walker, she could step out and care for them or harvest a handful of herbs.

Finally, colorful holiday plants bring warmth and cheer to any home. Choose from glamorous poinsettias, charming cyclamen, long-lived holiday cacti or amazing amaryllis. Visit your local garden center for fresh, locally grown selections.

Gardeners are among the easiest folks to find gifts for. Now on to the rest of the crew! Happy holidays from all of us at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center. If you have any houseplant or gardening questions, feel free to contact us at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

