

GIFTS FOR GARDENERS, GIFTS FOR PLANTS

By Valerie Jean Rose

November 25, 2011



Give experiences instead of things.

The main gardening season is over. Brightly colored flowers, fruits and vegetables give way to more subtle shades as garden beds rest beneath leaf mulch or cover crops. Most deciduous trees are pared down to wiry sculptures. The cold, wet spring and summer have drawn out the harvest season (October strawberries!) or eliminated harvesting altogether – many of us gave up on producing cucumbers or eggplant this year.

Oblivious to weather or soil conditions, the holiday gifting season is never late. You can give your favorite gardener another pair of gloves, or a gift certificate for gloves. However, in the spirit of making ‘green’ choices, consider giving experiences instead of things. This will also work for those of us who are experiencing a “delayed recovery” from the “Great Recession.”

“Couponing” for Gardeners

Create a book of coupons for your favorite gardener, redeemable for assistance with various garden chores. This is a great family-time activity – there are tasks suitable for people all ages and heights. In addition to coupons for weeding and mowing, add some unusual treats – homemade lemonade to refresh the sweaty gardener, or a foot rub/shoulder rub/foot bath. Make a home-cooked meal or tasty back-yard picnic, with freshly-harvested fruits, vegetables, flowers and herbs. Find new recipes using the gardener’s favorite home-grown ingredients. The internet is a great source of recipes, and Skagit County’s libraries have an array of cookbooks you can peruse. And who wouldn’t welcome a coupon for free dishwashing services?

You don’t need to wait until next year’s growing season to offer gardening assistance. Offer vouchers for cleaning, sharpening and oiling tools. Host a food cultivation-themed movie night: check your local library or DVD source for DVDs like “Good Food” or “The Real Dirt on Farmer John.” Be sure to provide popcorn for munching and hot cider.

Things That Are Also Experiences

Since wintertime is perfect for craft projects, offer coupons for shared creativity. Together you can make a gardening scrapbook, personalized stepping stones or unique plant labels. Search thrift stores for your materials. It’s easy to find blank binders, empty photo albums and decorative ribbons for a scrapbook. You can make plant labels from many materials, including old forks, scrap metal (beware of sharp edges) and a permanent marker. Make stepping-stones and other garden art with beads, shells, mysterious pieces of metal and broken dishware.

Does your gardener enjoy reading about interesting insects or ? Give them the most specific guide for our area, 'Insects of Skagit County' by retired entomologist Lloyd Eighme. This resource is exclusively available through the WSU Skagit County Extension. Call 360-428-4270 ext. 0 for details. If your gardener likes reading on their computer, the Master Gardener Manual on CD will turn their winter into a convenient on-demand learning opportunity (see Resources to order.) The CD is available to everyone – you don't need to be a Master Gardener – but you may be inspired to take the class in 2012.



The Sedro-Woolley Victory Garden was created in 2011 so seniors and others could volunteer their time to help the senior center produce fresh flowers, spices, herbs and produce. Swing by for a look next spring, or stop to help. Photo courtesy of anacortescommunitygardens.org

Volunteer Adventures

Help your favorite gardener share their skills by volunteering with them at one of Skagit County's many community gardens (see website under Resources.) From Anacortes to Concrete there are raised beds to build, children and adults to educate (and learn from), rows to plant and more. Remember to grow and donate extra veggies for people who are too often limited to canned goods and out-of-date bread products. You can also volunteer at your local food bank.

You and your favorite gardener can help someone who loves to grow plants, but is limited by arthritis or other challenges. Think about your neighbors, or people in your faith community, who would welcome some assistance from those more able-bodied. Your local school's garden will also welcome volunteers. If there's no garden at the school, help start one.

Road Trips, Classes and Staycations

The Northwest is blessed with an array of public and private gardens. Take the gardener on a regional tour. Remember “staycations”? Have fun in the winter planning a vacation you’ll enjoy during warmer (and hopefully drier) months. Start here in Skagit County at the Discovery Gardens; then visit other Master Gardener-created display gardens throughout Washington and Oregon.



For an experience gift, plan a tour with your favorite gardener of area and regional gardens, such as the Portland Japanese Garden in Oregon, where the garden’s contemplative space is shown. Photo courtesy of Jane Billingham

Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, BC each boast Chinese-style gardens. Seattle’s Kubota Garden, once a plant nursery, is filled with amazing specimens of Asian trees and shrubs. Seattle’s Japanese Garden is a jewel within the Washington Park Arboretum. The 230-acre park was designed by the famous landscape architecture firm of Olmstead Brothers. This firm’s masterful vision also shaped parts of another, lesser-known public garden, the Lakewold Estate, just south of Tacoma. On the north shore of the Columbia River you can see heirloom vegetables and flowers growing at the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

Don’t forget to include at least a few plant nurseries in your adventures. In addition to the region’s many splendid nurseries, check out a few specialized operations. Skagit County boasts a basket-willow nursery, Dunbar Gardens; in nearby Bellingham you can visit Plantas Nativa for northwest native plants and seeds.

Many gardens and nurseries offer classes. A gift certificate will allow the gardener to choose their favorite experience.

Get Strong Enough to Garden

After visiting nurseries and gardens, the gardener will return inspired with plans for new plantings, water features, etc. To get in shape for these projects, winter is the perfect time to exercise together. Join a gym – or excavate and use the exercise equipment in your home (the trampoline beneath that pile of magazines, those kettle bells serving as hat stands.) As the gardener redeems your coupons for mowing, weeding, and building a retaining wall, you’ll be ready to follow through on your commitments. If you are lucky, you will be rewarded with a coupon for a foot massage or a shoulder rub.

Community Gardens

Vegetable gardens, planted and maintained by community members, are cropping up across Skagit County. Here are some of the gardens and contact information:

Mount Vernon:

Azusa Community Garden

14904 Highway 20 (west of Mount Vernon)
Everett Chu: 360-424-1580

Bethany Covenant Church Garden

1318 S 18th Street
Andy Anderson: 360-391-0713.

Garden Gate Group Hillcrest Christian

Fellowship

1830 S 13th Street
Larry Ashby: 360-708-7926

Kulshan Creek Community Garden

2200 block of Kulshan Avenue
Jon Gerondale: 336-0630 (ext. 1435)

Unity Garden

Continental Place (Just south of Hoag Road)
Sarah Detzer: 360-424-3073

Viva Farms

affiliated with WSU Extension and
GrowFood.org.
Sarita Schaffer: 206-914-7948

Anacortes:

29th Street Garden

anacortescommunitygardens.org
Betty Carteret: 360-299-8553

Concrete:

Angele Cupples Community Garden

Superior Avenue North and Main Street
Jason Miller: 360-853-8213

La Conner:

Garden of Hope

Avon Allen Road and Best Road
affiliated with the La Conner Sunrise Food
Bank
Gil Gillmor: 360-420-0558

Sedro-Woolley:

Sedro-Woolley Victory Garden

715 Pacific Street
affiliated with Sedro-Woolley Senior Center
Ellen Palmer: 360-855-1531

Resources:

- Skagit County Community Gardens, from the Anacortes Community Garden website:
<http://anacortescommunitygardens.org/resources/skagit-co-gardens.html>
- “Garden Your Way to Health and Fitness” by Bunny Guinness and Jaqueline Knox, Timber Press, 2008
- Historic Gardens to Visit in the Pacific Northwest, Kathy Mendelson, ed.:
<http://www.halcyon.com/tmend/gardens.htm>
- Master Gardener Manual on CD
<https://pubs.wsu.edu/ItemDetail.aspx?ReturnTo=0&ProductID=15400> or call 800-723-1763