

Gifts for Gardeners

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By Valerie Rose



More than just another pair of gloves: classes, books and adventures to share

In this gift-giving season, are you wondering what present to give your favorite gardener? Here are some fun ideas to share, when you're dropping hints about what *you* would like, or finding gifts for friends, family and the environment.

Plants

Winter-blooming perennials, such as hellebores and cyclamen, are available right now. They can be planted outside in late fall or winter. Find hearty specimens at one of Skagit County's many nurseries.

Tools

Unless you know exactly what kind, size, and shape of tool your gardener wants, a gift card may be safer than a guess. How about a sharpening tool to help maintain the gardener's existing stock of spades, rakes and hoes? A single file can suffice, or you can get a specialized tool sharpener.

How about a gift for the environment? Give a human-powered reel mower as an alternative to a noisy gas-powered model (or a rake in place of a leaf blower.) According to the EPA, every weekend about 54 million Americans mow their lawns, using 800,000,000 gallons of gas per year and producing up to 5% of the nation's air pollution! A human-powered reel mower will give your garden-gift recipient a quieter way to mow, while getting exercise. Or you could help them turn the lawn into a garden, and put the grass to bed for good!

Skagit PUD may not be the 1st place you think of when shopping for gardening gifts, but their sturdy, well-designed rain barrels are a gift for the gardener, the garden and the environment. My two well-placed rain barrels from Skagit PUD have solved my back yard drainage problem. As a bonus, the rain barrels' bright blue color recalls the color of the sky above those autumn and winter clouds!

(If your gardener isn't a fan of bright blue, the rain barrels can be painted any color.) Contact the PUD at 360 424-7104 or http://skagitpud.org/index.php/conservation/rain_barrels.



Unusual garden tools, such as this Korean weed cultivator at Skagit Farmers Supply in Mount Vernon, have potential as gifts. **Photo by Frank Varga/Skagit Valley Herald.**

You can find other styles of rain barrels at Skagit Farmers Supply/Country Stores, Ace Hardware stores, Sebo's Do-It Centers, and True Value Hardware store in Sedro-Woolley.

A drip irrigation system is another water-conserving gift for the garden and the environment. Offering to help install a drip irrigation system will also be well received.

Time

The gift of your time is always welcome – make coupons for weeding, mulching or hauling compost. And every gardener can use a gift certificate for a massage.

Classes

Foxglove Farm on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, is a couple of ferry rides away, and well worth the trip. A working farm hosting outstanding gardening and farming workshops, Foxglove is a great place for a learning vacation. The WSU Extension offices in Whatcom, Skagit, Island and Snohomish counties all provide classes for farmers – some are also geared towards home gardens. You can also find classes for gardeners at the Hovander Homestead Park in Whatcom County.

Looking southward, Seattle Tilth offers classes on raising vegetables, chickens and children (well, gardening with children, not planting and watering them.) And classes at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture are not just for urbanites.

You can also treat your gardener a day of classes at Country Living Expo and Cattlemen's Winterschool in Snohomish County in January (more info at <http://skagit.wsu.edu/CountryLivingExpo/index.htm>)



Colorful, helpful gardening books, like these at Easton's Books in Mount Vernon, can make great gifts and are readily available at new and used bookstores in the area. **Photo by Frank Varga/Skagit Valley Herald.**

Books and magazines

Most gardeners will enjoy books on planning, planting, pruning, picking plants, pots, perennials and many other garden-related subjects that don't begin with the letter 'p.' Growing vegetables year-round, caring for fruit trees, building a rain garden, cultivating herbs, adding wildlife habitat to your garden – you may find a book that you'll want to borrow and enjoy yourself.

A magazine subscription will delight your gardener for at least a year. Look for gardening books and magazines at the Skagit Valley Food Co-op, Skagit Farmers Supply/Country Stores, True Value Hardware store in Sedro-Woolley, and any

of Skagit County's new and used bookstores: Watermark, Earth Bound or Pelican Bay Books (Anacortes:); The Next Chapter (La Conner); D & J Used Books and Borders Express (Burlington); and Easton's and The Tattered Page (Mt. Vernon.)

Weather

One friend suggested that gardeners want ‘at least 350 days a year when the temperature is 75 degrees.’ With climate change upending our usual weather patterns, this may not be as impossible as it sounds. But I can’t imagine how to gift-wrap such a present.



Sturdy, well-designed rain barrels are a gift for the gardener, for the garden and for the environment. Attractive rainbarrels like this one at an Anacortes home are available at home and garden stores. Basic bright blue barrels are available from the Skagit PUD. **Photo courtesy Skagit County Master Gardeners.**