

ASK THE MASTER GARDENER

For the gardener on your list From time and thyme to tines and timers

By Valerie Jean Rose



Garden gifts are for everyone! Even for your friends who aren't gardening — yet. Even folks who live in apartments will enjoy something from this list. Remember to support locally owned businesses — buy local and keep your money in the community.

Most gardeners love books about plants, plans, insects — all facets of growing and enjoying plants. Take an inspiring gardening book, add a cup of steaming tea and a comfy chair and gardeners will enjoy hours of inspiration and daydreams.

Check out these book ideas, then look for new or used editions at your favorite independent bookseller, e.g., Easton's or the Tattered Page in Mount Vernon, Next Chapter in La Conner, Watermark in Anacortes; or if you must buy online, try <http://www.powells.com>.

Books by Northwest garden writers Marty Wingate, Ann Lovejoy, Valerie Eaton and Ciscoe Morris are “perennial” favorites. Sunset magazine's Western Garden is a great reference tool. Another timeless guide is “Gardening with Native Plants of the Pacific Northwest” by UW Professor Emeritus Art Kruckeberg.

Every Skagit gardener needs “Insects of Skagit County” by entomologist Lloyd Eighme, Ph.D. Your purchase supports the Master Gardener program. Buy the book at the WSU Skagit County Extension office in Burlington, or call 360-428-4720 ext. 0.

“Gardening in the Maritime Northwest” from Seattle Tilth is a well-organized, month-by-month gardening guide, available at the Skagit Valley Food Co-op. Don't forget “Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades” by Steve Solomon. This classic regional gardening guide includes a “Soil 101” chapter for who want to know what's going on beneath the surface.

“Dirt: The Erosion of Civilizations” by UW Professor David Montgomery is a fascinating, sobering read. For a chilling overview of U.S. food policy: anything by Michael Pollan.

Looking for a reason to dig up your lawn to plant vegetables instead? Kingsolver's “Animal, Vegetable, Miracle” is a great inspiration to consume locally grown food.

For children: “Pumpkin Circle: The Story of a Garden” by George Levenson and “Roots, Shoots, Buckets and Boots; Gardening Together With Children” by Sharon Lovejoy. Restaurateur and cookbook author Alice Waters helps schools and kids grow together with “The Edible Schoolyard.”

Giving a copy of “Canning & Preserving Your Own Harvest: An Encyclopedia of Country Living” by Carla Emery may result in gifts of dried, canned and pickled produce next season. Or give edible treats from your garden, along with the canning recipe.

Gardeners love to browse seed catalogues. My favorite is from the Territorial Seed Co. It includes brief but thorough information on growing and harvesting a wide range of vegetables, fruits, flowers, grasses and cover crops. And their seeds are cultivated for our damp, cool northwestern growing conditions. Magazine subscriptions to “Organic Gardening,” “Horticulture” or “Fine Gardening” will be enjoyed all year.

Your favorite mycologist (current or future mushroom fancier) may enjoy “Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms,” by Northwest-based fungi researcher Paul Stamets. Visit www.fungi.com for the Fungi Perfecti catalogue, which includes books by Stamets along with mushroom-growing kits, dried mushrooms and more.



Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald *Not all gifts for gardeners are easy to wrap*, as Skagit County Master Gardener Valerie Rose of Mount Vernon has discovered.

For gardeners without an outside garden (folks in apartments and condos), give a copy of “Incredible Vegetables from Self-Watering Containers” by Edward C. Smith. And these gardeners can probably use a new container or two. Get a shiny pot, a bag of potting soil and a sturdy trowel, and you’re giving a small garden fit for a porch or balcony.

For serious patio gardeners, try a Grow Box from Charley’s Greenhouse and Garden. On a smaller scale, a windowsill planter of herbs adds a lively zing to the winter kitchen.

Gift certificates to your favorite local garden store let gardeners choose the seeds, tools or books they really want. If your gift isn’t available in December, give an IOU for next season’s offerings.

A rain gauge helps answer the question, “Was that a downpour or a drizzle?” Gardeners who, can’t go anywhere without a GPS, will probably want an entire weather station.

Speaking of tools as gifts, several gardeners shared these favorites: a Japanese digging tool, or hori-hori; Bahco or Felco brand shears; Fiskars-brand yard rake; large plastic Haws watering can; stainless steel spades and digging forks from Lee Valley Hardware; “Grandpa’s Weeder”; a rain barrel; and West Country brand gloves are just some of the suggestions. (Perhaps you could build a large shed or small barn to store all these items?)

For a free gift, tell the gardener about online services like hortsense.org. The Skagit County Master Gardener’s Web site offers an array of resources, including an archive of “Ask the Master Gardener” columns. Direct your gardener to <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/archive.htm>.

If you're making a personal coupon gift book, be sure to include several trips to the Washington State University Discovery Garden next to the WSU research center, 16650 Memorial Highway 536, west of Mount Vernon. This array of gardens is open daily from dawn to dusk. A small sample includes: the Children's Garden, Fall and Winter Garden, irises, herbs, and the Enabling Garden for people with visual or physical limitations. Admission is free, but donations are welcome. Map and details at: <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/discovery-gardens.htm>.

The one gift everyone can use is more time! Make a gift certificate good for several hours of assistance in the garden — or you can free up the gardener by taking on some of their chores. Make dinner one night a week, do the laundry and grocery shopping, provide childcare, and let the gardener focus on the miraculous world of dirt and plants. The gift of time will be welcomed by any gardener. And you'll benefit by enjoying the fruits (and flowers and vegetables) of their happy labors next season.



Left: A Conant rain gauge helps answer the question, "Was that a downpour or a drizzle?" Photo courtesy ambientweather.com. *Top right:* "The Herb Quarterly," www.herbquarterly.com, offers illustrations and photos, recipes, and other uses for herbs and edible flowers. *Bottom right:* A hori-hori or Japanese digging tool could delight a gardener on your gift list. Photo courtesy gemplers.com. gardeners

