

Gifts for Gardeners

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Adding to the pleasure of gardening

Gardeners are some of the easiest people to buy gifts for. Gardeners love tools and things like compost. But it is important to pay attention to their individual needs, because not all gardeners like or need the same things.

The most important thing is to consider is the physicality, strength and physical limitations of the gardener. Nowadays, there are many tools available for those with special needs, including “lefties” and people with limited movement.

Secondly, what kind of gardening and how large a garden do they have? Not everyone longs for a front-end loader or a dump truck load of dairy manure. But fertilizers, compost and mulch are welcomed.

One rule of thumb is to buy the best quality item you can afford. When it comes to tools, you get what you pay for. High quality tools perform better, last longer and tend to be easier to use.

Gardeners have their “must haves.” Topping the list of weeding tools preferred by Skagit County master gardeners is a sturdy, hand-held pick, a claw cultivator, a hori-hori knife, a Cape Cod weeder and a mattock. (WSU master gardeners cannot endorse specific brand names or companies, though most of us have our favorites.)

A top-quality pair of by-pass pruning shears is essential. Pruners come in various sizes and must feel comfortable. The blade should be tempered carbon steel, the handle aluminum alloy, and have all replaceable parts. Gardeners are fiercely loyal to their hand pruners, keep them for years and are averse to lending them.

A pair of loppers is another useful tool and also come in different sizes. Ones with a ratcheting feature give extra cutting power, which is nice when you are reaching over your head. If possible, try out several versions to see which feels the most usable and comfortable when reaching up.

Sometimes it is better to use a saw for cutting woody branches, and a quality folding pruning saw comes in handy. They vary in design, features and quality.



A survey of gardeners revealed that most gardeners prefer practical gifts, such as gardening gloves, a pronged hand tool, garden shoes or boots, a versatile hori hori tool, quality pruners or loppers. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

Many shrubs and bushy perennials are more easily pruned with hedge shears than with hand pruners or loppers. High-quality Japanese hedge shears will make fast work of cutting back lavender, boxwood, floribunda roses, sword ferns, and heather. Their price is worth it.

For tall shrubs, fruit or ornamental trees, a long, pole pruner is a must. The best ones have a catch-and-hold feature. For smaller framed gardeners, there are lightweight aluminum ones that are easier to use.

To collect all of that debris, a pop-up collapsible bag and sturdy tarps are all handy options. And for hauling, a two-wheeled cart is easier to use than a wheelbarrow for many tasks. Also, a wagon can be especially useful.

A punch card for the yard waste collection center would be a great stocking stuffer. Even handier would be a year of yard waste pickup service. Having a compost pile or bin may not always be the best solution for homeowners as rats are a reality here.

All gardeners need a good shovel that fits them and their needs. Bigger is not necessarily better. There are shovels for spading, for planting, for edging and for moving soil and gravel. Ash handles and forged steel blades are the best grade. Perhaps you could offer to sharpen your recipient's tools on a regular basis. That would be a much-appreciated gift.

Every gardener wants severable pairs of durable gloves. White kid leather looks beautiful in magazine photos, but dirt and mud call for something more practical. Gloves with a layer of canvas last longer. There are gloves with a Teflon surface that make handling blackberries and thorny shrubs a breeze. There are also gloves designed specifically for rose pruning that also protect your wrists and arms.

Speaking of dirt and mud, at least one pair of quality gardening shoes and a pair boots are a must around here. Most gardeners have several!

Vegetable growers appreciate large, extra sturdy, adjustable tomato cages that can be used as trellises for other things, too. For starting seeds, an extra-large heating mat is nice to have. Seed starting kits are great gifts for beginner gardeners. Perhaps a grow light? Florescent shop lights work fine.

Another popular item is a kneeler/bench stool. Or a large container of slug bait (the iron phosphate kind that is safe to use around pets and wildlife). How about a roll of 8-ft high black plastic deer fencing?

Always handy is a garden fork for loosening soil, or compacted mulch, and for digging up and dividing plants and bulbs. A hoe is one of the oldest gardening tools known. There are many kinds, and they work differently.

Smaller items include a blade sharpener, a soil thermometer, plant ties, plant labels, magnifying glass, a bird book, an insect book, small pruning snips, a box of latex or nitrile gloves and hand cream. Or offer a home-cooked dinner for your gardener.

Still wondering? Well, no gardener ever turned down a gift certificate to a local nursery. You cannot go wrong there, and it will make your gardener light up like a Christmas tree! For a gardener, more than half the pleasure of gardening is the work itself. Well-made and proper tools add to that pleasure.

RESOURCES:

- “Garden Tools & Equipment.” Fine Gardening. Taunton Press. 1995. (This book is a series of articles taken from many issues of Fine Gardening magazine.)
- The Tool Book. William Bryant Logan. Smith& Hawken.1997.
- “Gardening Basics-100 Skills to Make You a Better Gardener.” Fine Gardening. Taunton Press.2012.