



# And a Little Flavored Vodka Might Help

Giving gifts from your garden can soften the harshness of the Christmas machine.

by Carol Barany for Yakima Valley Master Gardeners

This lemon and rosemary hand scrub is the perfect gift for gardeners, or anyone else who likes to play in the dirt.

CAROL BARANY PHOTO

**T**wenty-five more shopping days until Christmas. If a month of Black Fridays, Doorbusters, and Screaming Deals fills you with dread, it's time to pause and reconsider your strategy.

I'm yearning for a simpler, more peaceful celebration that brings me closer to family and friends, yet unplugging the Christmas machine hasn't always been easy for me. If you're reading this column, you're likely a gardener, creative and self-reliant by nature, with a penchant for working with your hands. Don't forget that the garden just keeps on giving, and that your own backyard can be the source of the most meaningful gifts of all to share this Christmas.

## *Gift Cards*

As the most requested holiday gift for nearly 15 years, 83% of Americans will purchase at least one this Christmas. I've got an even better idea. Are you a vegetable gardener? Buy a basket at your favorite thrift store and tie it with a beautiful ribbon. Make a heartfelt card, letting the lucky recipient know they can expect a delivery of your very freshest garden produce monthly during the 2022 growing season. Is

your garden all about flowers? Do the same with an empty vase. A surprise like this is always a beautiful thing.

### *Gardener's Lemon and Rosemary Hand Scrub*

This scrub has enough grit to coax the dirt off the grimmest of hands, tempered with the soothing balm of coconut oil. In a large bowl, add ¼ cup of softened coconut oil and the zest and juice of a large lemon. Mix until smooth.

Fold in ½ cup of liquid soap. Next, add 1 ½ cups of Epsom salts and ½ cup of Kosher salt. Stir until all the ingredients are well-combined.

Fold in one tablespoon of finely chopped dried rosemary (or lavender, or both). If the mixture seems too thick, add a little more liquid soap. For a grittier scrub, add more Epsom salts. This recipe will make 12 ounces of scrub. Pack into pretty jars with tight-fitting lids, adding a ribbon and a tag.

### *Infused Vodkas*

No pickles or jams to give away? No worries.

The gift of vodka, infused with flavors from your garden, might just be the preferred preserve to receive this Christmas. Simply add your flavorings and a 750 ml bottle of vodka to a clean, sterilized glass jar with a tight fitting lid.

Let it all steep for 2-3 days in a cool, dark place. To get the flavor intensity you're looking for, taste each day (someone's gotta do it). When it's perfect, strain the infused vodka, through a very fine sieve or coffee filter, back into the original bottle, and discard the solids. Make a Martha Stewart-worthy label, and it's ready. Well-strained infusions made with fresh ingredients will last several months in the refrigerator. Those made with dried ingredients like spices or coffee beans will keep indefinitely, unrefrigerated.

### *Hot Pepper Infused Vodka*

Make this one for the Bloody Mary lovers in your life. Stem, seed, and quarter lengthwise a fresh or dried serrano, jalapeño, and habanero chile. Place the three chiles and one 750-ml bottle of vodka in a large glass container and cap tightly. Let stand at room temperature for 2 days, shaking gently once or twice a day. Taste for flavor and heat intensity, allowing the brew to infuse for up to 2 more days if needed (infusing longer may result in bitterness). Strain the infused vodka back into the original bottle. Cap tightly and refrigerate until ready to serve.

### *Lavender and Rosemary Infused Vodka*

This recipe from Emeril Lagasse features his two favorite herbs. The finished infusion “adds a floral touch to a Vodka Martini and makes an ultra-refreshing Vodka Tonic.” Wash and pat dry one sprig of lavender and one sprig of rosemary. Place in a jar with a tight fitting lid, along with one 750-ml bottle of vodka. Allow to steep, strain, and then pour back into the bottle. Bam!

More ideas for making vodka infusions with fruit are found at <http://www.thekitchn.com/how-to-make-fruit-vodkas-194066>.

### *Herbal Vinegars*

Rosemary, sage, thyme, and lavender are harvestable in my garden all winter long. A splash of vinegar flavored with any one of them, or a combination, adds a ‘pop’ to recipes. Start by washing and sterilizing a glass jar. Wash, dry, and slightly bruise enough herbs (you can add garlic, peppercorns, lemon peel, or dried chilies) to fill the jar 1/3 full. Bring your favorite vinegar to a boil and fill the jar to within ½ inch of the top. Cover and steep for 1-2 weeks. Strain out the herbs and decant the infused

vinegar into a lidded sterilized bottle. Keep refrigerated.

Any of these gifts, the loving work of a gardener's heart and hands, is easily made from simple ingredients.

Here's to a merry and bright December.

