

A bouquet of holiday shopping ideas for the gardener in your life...

It's crunch time again. Only a few more days and I am still way behind on my holiday shopping. Fortunately, I have many gardeners on my list, and they are by far the easiest people to buy gifts for. One never has to worry about specifics like what size to get. Books, tools, containers, etc... Any of these would fulfill a gardener's fantasy.

I love my electronic reader, but when it comes to gardening books, nothing beats the real thing. Turning the pages and looking at colorful pictures stimulates my imagination. For those new to gardening in this area, "The Southern Living Gardening Book" is a good place to start. This is a basic but complete guide to gardening in the South with the different regions delineated. (Here in Beaufort County, we are zone "CS" – for Coastal South.)

My own favorite books, those I refer to constantly, are "Dirr's Trees and Shrubs for Warm Climates" by Michael Dirr and "The Southern Gardener's Book of Lists" by Lois Trigg Chaplin. I also thoroughly enjoy the humorous but informative writings of Felder Rushing, and books by Elizabeth Lawrence get right to my soul. I feel as if I am actually kneeling in her garden and feeling the earth when I read her words. Andrea Wulf's "Founding Gardeners" sheds light on how agriculture and horticulture shaped the foundation of our nation. For my son who loves succulents, I recently purchased "Succulent Container Gardens" by Debra Lee Baldwin; the pictures alone were worth the price of the book.

Horticultural gadgets are another favorite gift for those of us who love to dig. My dog experiences such glee when he's madly digging, and I can understand it – well somewhat – because it does feel good to turn the soil. A good shovel and/or a spade are essential for this. Skip the bargain brands here and go for the best you can afford. I have seen some excellent quality gardening tools in our local hardware store. The jury is still out on the ergonomic tools; they are supposed to be easier to use, but I have not heard from anyone who really thinks they are better.

For several years I noticed an ad in gardening magazines for a tool called the Cobra Head Weeder. It looked interesting but, at my age, I already had a garage full of hand tools. However, I was given one by the manufacturer at a gardening conference and I have to say it has become my number one "go to" tool for hand cultivating, weeding and digging small holes. I like it so

much that when I recently saw the long handled version offered in a silent auction, I stood beside it, ready to top all bids, and I came home triumphant. Happily, it works as well as the hand tool for me, and I have given all my old tools to charity. While generally I prefer to buy locally, to my knowledge, this one is only available from the manufacturer.
(www.cobrahead.com)

Rather than gifting with the ho-hum, usual and short-lived Poinsettia, how about a tree that will provide your holiday table with sweet Satsuma mandarins for years to come? The tangerine-like fruit from these hardy trees rivals the expensive Clementines you see in the grocery stores. Meyer Lemon and grapefruit grow well here also, and it is pretty special to be able to walk out the door and pick your own fresh fruit. Here in Beaufort County we have our own citrus grower, Plant Folks Nursery, and the trees are certified to be disease-free. These trees are available from most of the local nurseries and directly from the grower in Port Royal. Best part is they are forgiving trees and super easy to grow.

A living, balled and burlapped evergreen Christmas tree is a gift to your landscape for years to come. Be sure to keep this tree outside in a shady location and keep the root ball well moistened until a few days before Christmas. Occasionally hosing down the foliage, while it is still outside, helps too. Dry, indoor heat can be a real killer for these trees, the fewer days in the house the better. When you get ready to plant the tree, follow the directions Laura Lee Rose shared in the last edition of this column. (<http://www.lcweekly.com/lifestyle-how-does-your-garden-grow/2392-plant-a-tree-for-arbor-day-part-two>)

When ordering any plants or garden related material online, be sure to always check with the Garden Watchdog at the Dave's Garden website first. (<http://davesgarden.com/products/gwd/>) This site has become widely accepted as a reliable reference on which companies stand behind their products.

We gardeners are admittedly a strange bunch and, unusual as it sounds, most would sincerely appreciate a gift of "soil amendments." That is a polite way of saying the gardener in your life would love a truckload of well-aged manure or compost. Pine straw or other mulches are high on the list too. No need to spend a lot of cash on gardeners, either; a soil test from the Clemson Extension Service, at a modest \$6, would be a unique stocking stuffer.

I haven't even begun to cover things like pruning shears, containers, earth boxes, gardening gloves and totes, potting benches or boots. My brother in law is getting a drip irrigation kit and

that is a whole other column for later. The list is endless. If only everyone was a gardener!

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