



Fortunately for us happy dirt-diggers, the much loved process of gardening spans the seasons. The enjoyable tasks that need to be accomplished, both inside and outside, keep a gardener busy and happy throughout the year. With the holiday gift-giving season approaching, family, friends and neighbors may be scratching their heads in confusion while choosing an appropriate expression of love and gratitude. To make choosing those gifts easier - ask what will make all of those tasks easier and more enjoyable for your special dirt-digger?

Tools are always a good idea, especially if the make and model are specified by the user – it is a bit difficult for the receiver to be surprised after they are made to try them out repeatedly in the store! Any tool that is purchased should be state of the art in ergonomic design, made with the most durable materials, and the highest quality afforded. Knee pads should be high the giving list - buy a good industrial quality pair that will hold up to constant use. For those gardeners that may be having a bit of difficulty getting close to the ground, there are fantastic weeding carts/scooters that will reduce the strain on knees and joints during tasks like planting, low trimming and weeding. Garden gloves are needed in vast quantities. Start with a good pair of leather gloves, for those intermittently tough projects. For everyday use, lightweight gloves with a partially rubberized palm and finger area would be a nice choice. Buy lots of them, they are great but do wear out with constant daily use. A good bypass style pruner for heavy use is a Felco model #7 with a rotating handle and wire cutter. The motion during use actually allows the tool to rock with the hand as it cuts, reducing hand fatigue. Smaller hands will appreciate the narrower profile and lighter weight Felco model #6. Even though it is a bit smaller, the cut is strong. Repair and replacement items matched to existing tools are always a blessing to receive. Springs, handles, new blades, and sharpening stones and oil are constant necessities for every active gardener. For you last minute shoppers stopping at the gas station on the way to the party – look for household 3-in-1 oil, kitchen cleaning pads (Scotchbrite made by 3M work well), and towels to do the tool cleaning on, and oh yes, don't forget the nice bow.

With all of the work that goes into making a garden or landscape look wonderful, don't forget to encourage a bit relaxation in the midst of the on-going splendor. An often overlooked time in the outdoor gardening cycle, winter is excellent for observation and reflection. A sunny winter morning begs for a garden walk-through. A lovely way to do that is with a nice insulated cup of something warm. How about giving your gardener a couple of pounds of their

favorite fair trade coffee beans? Or maybe some good tea - the white teas bring a whole new taste to tea drinking. Stop at a specialty shop and ask for help in picking out something new and unusual.

Items that make the garden a great place to sit and enjoy nature are always welcome gifts. Although almost any style, from many different materials, at various price levels can be found – the most amazing thing to find was real wicker with a durable finish. It is great to know that old garden standards, like well made wicker, are still available. There are numerous artisans creating works of art in clay, wood, metal, and glass for every type of use – decorative and functional. Tables, chairs, and swings can be installation art pieces or places to sit and have that warm coffee on a nice winter morning. And don't forget the rope hammock or swing – every home should have at least one. It has a relaxing motion that is so enjoyable you may feel slightly wicked.

Another favorite gift is unusual containers for plant enhancement – either indoor or outdoor. They range in price from a few dollars to a few thousand dollars and in styles from new and modern to luxuriously antique. Choosing a container is something to be done with care. If it is to be used for a year-round outside display, choose those made from materials that will withstand the elements – heat, cold, sun, and shade all produce effects that will degrade and may potentially destroy containers if not placed carefully. Look for those special handmade containers as tokens of love and appreciation. Don't forget to include statues in the mix for plant enhancement. Does your gardener have a penchant for strange garden art – oh say gnomes, for instance? There are many unusual and tasteful ways to display all forms of garden art whether hidden in the plants, trees, and shrubs or prominently on display. From the supremely cliché pink flamingo to the one-of-a-kind metal or natural material art piece – the choices are limitless and there is something for every taste and budget.

Rare and unusual plants are welcome additions to any garden or entryway. Has that gardener been talking about getting into orchids or other tropical plants? Maybe cacti are of extreme interest. Unusual and hardy trees and shrubs may be a new passion. Giving a membership to a botanic garden with a nice collection or enrolling them in a chapter of an orchid, cacti or woody plant society would be a great gesture of caring. And putting a gardener in with any other plant nut is a perfect pairing. Think about donating a tree in honor of your gardener. Many parks and

botanic gardens welcome patrons of nature to continue to keep the plant collections growing. A gift certificate from a botanic garden, favorite garden center, plant farm, or nursery may seem the easy way out - but it is a gift that will be 100% appreciated by any gardener.

Items that can be used any season of the year can be dressed for holiday giving by adding a bow and maybe a few pretty baubles. A living tree used for inside holiday decoration (limit the time inside please!) can be planted outside and remembered throughout the year. This is the perfect time of the year to give mulch and compost. All you need to do is add a big bow to the bags or pile and any gardener worth their salt will thank their lucky stars that they were the recipients of your gift giving prowess. Coming in and out of the house always brings a bit of the garden with. An ideal item for cleaning messy shoes is a boot scraper. There are some adorable and efficient bristle cleaners that are made to look like garden creatures - ladybugs and worms. What better way to leave the garden soil where it does the most good?

For those gardeners that love to travel, the flower shows will start up soon. Northeast (Boston), Philadelphia, Seattle, and Chicago all do great flower shows beginning the first part of the year. Garden tours throughout the world are offered almost anytime of the year. Many botanic gardens sponsor tours with guides very knowledgeable in plants of the region to be visited.

If your gardener prefers to stay closer to home, a gift of hardscaping may be a welcome addition to the garden or landscape. Stone and brick – think of the possibilities! Other hard structures - a potting house or greenhouse will offer an opportunity to increase the plants enjoyed and the seasons they are enjoyed in. These structures range from very small to commercial in size and they can be extremely decorative – lots of architectural details - to purely functional.

Holiday gifts for gardeners can be a real challenge. Identifying items that satisfy that passion will make gift giving easy. This time of year offers you an opportunity to show your friends, family and loved ones just how much you understand their passion for the process of gardening.