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News Release

Gifts for the Gardener

Q. I am checking off names on my Christmas list, and I almost have everything done. However, there are a couple of names on my list that have me stumped. Both are gardeners, but are at very different points in their favorite past-time. One has just discovered her green thumb and the other one has been gardening for years. I am at a loss when it comes to gardening gift ideas. The search has been quite overwhelming. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Unfortunately, gift ideas can be a chore from time to time. I tend to struggle in some form or fashion every year. But, never fear! I should be able to bring some clarity to your gift-buying dilemma.

Tools are always a safe bet. There are many items that would make great gifts for the seasoned gardener, as well as those who are just beginning to get their hands dirty. And, while the veteran probably has most of these items, who wouldn’t enjoy a shiny new upgrade?

- Spade – this item is a short-handled shovel with a square head. It is great for digging holes for planting and edging beds. This item can be fairly expensive, but worth every penny. A quality spade will last well into the next generation of gardeners.
- Hand Trowel – trowels are a “must-have” for those small chores around the garden. They are perfect for planting small annuals, vegetables and herbs. The most durable ones are constructed of one piece of forged steel, with a rubberized handle.
- Bypass Pruners – this tool is the real “workhorse” of the garden. They are a necessity for many jobs, including deadheading, shaping, and cleaning up last season’s worn foliage. A good set of pruners can be fairly expensive, but quality and durability are key. Make sure they can be taken apart for cleaning and sharpening purposes.
- Loppers – if you have trees and shrubs in your landscape, and most of us do, you definitely need a pair of loppers. Typically, they can be used to cut branches with a diameter up to and including 2 inches, which makes them very handy for many pruning and shaping tasks in the garden.

- Hand Rake – this item is perfect for those small areas. It has narrow tines which prevent damage when removing leaves and debris from your annual and perennial beds.

Also, there are many tools available locally and online for those who may have physical limitations or limited mobility. Items with larger grips or those that use a ratcheting action are just a few examples.

If tools are not quite what you are looking for, a gardening reference book(s) may be just the ticket. One great book is Easy Gardens for the South. One of the authors is Harvey Cotten, the director of the Huntsville Botanical Gardens. This book has 300 plus pages of good, practical gardening information and great pictures for folks in the South. Another valuable reference source is The Southern Gardener's Book of Lists: The Best Plants for All Your Needs, Wants, and Whims by Lois Trigg Chaplin. With over 200 lists, this book is great for making sure that you have the right plant for the right place. It includes trees, annuals, and everything in between. This reference also addresses challenges such as slopes, poor drainage, and alkaline soils. Either of these books would make a great addition to any gardener's library.

If you want something with a little more whimsy, and a little less practicality, a few other ideas are garden-themed jewelry, birdhouses, wind chimes, or decorative totes. Who says that your gift has to be useful?

If you just can't make a decision, then let your favorite gardener make the decision herself. A gift certificate to her local garden center of choice could be the perfect conclusion to your gift-buying journey.

For more information about this topic please contact Bethany O'Rear, Regional Extension Agent-Home Grounds, Gardens and Home Pests at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email bao0004@aces.edu.