

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



December 12, 2008

Holiday gifts for the gardener

As it is the season for sharing, giving and caring, I thought I'd share my list of gift ideas for the gardener. In my mind, the sentiments of the season should be practiced all the time.

All the suggestions I've made can be given at any time of year. They're good for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and, please note, for every day of Hanukkah.

1. Garden tools. These are always welcome to a gardener. Well made, ergonomic tools can last almost forever. And, each time the tool is used, the giver will be gratefully remembered.
2. Forget about garden wear unless you're thinking sturdy, comfortable, waterproof footwear or quality, lightweight sun protection. No true gardener bothers with trendy fashions. One cannot actually go about one's gardening chores if one has to worry about keeping the clothes looking good. Truth be told, gardeners wear their well worn, soil stained garbs as a badge of honor.
3. Good garden gloves. Long, tough gloves for dealing with thorny plants like roses, pliable leather ones and soft, washable gloves for dry, easy chores are all needed. My preferred choice is a box of surgical latex gloves. Cheap and functional. They offer some protection, keep my hands dry and yet, allow me to feel whatever it is I'm handling. As they are disposable, I try not to use them too much. Don't want to add to the garbage pile. That's the one drawback.

4. Manicures and pedicures. Which gardener does not need them? Getting the gardener away from the garden and to the salon could be a problem. To some, the rough hands with dirt under the nails are a source of pride.
5. There is always a vast selection of beautiful pots and statuary to choose as presents. But give them only when you are sure about the recipient's taste and desires. Gardeners are a very picky lot.
6. The same goes for plants, shrubs and trees. Give gift certificates from nurseries. I have often given a collection of daffodils to honor or in memory of a loved one. The recipient gets an announcement and the bulbs arrive at the appropriate planting time in the fall. At that time, I help with the planting. It becomes a time to share thoughts and memories as we get the satisfaction of planting and look forward to the spring.
7. Subscriptions to garden magazines. But make sure the person does not already get the publication.
8. Books on gardens and gardening. The Second Story Book Shop right here in Chappaqua has a nice selection and can order what you want. Think global and act local.
9. Membership to local public gardens. In our area, I highly recommend The New York Botanical Garden and Wave Hill, both in the Bronx. www.nybg.org and www.wavehill.org.
Here in New Castle, we have Rocky Hills. This is the spectacular garden of Henriette Suhr. It will in due course become a part of Westchester Parks and the Garden Conservancy. At that time, it will become a public garden and a place we can be very proud to have in our midst. In the meantime, in support of this endeavor, I urge you to give someone the gift of a membership to the Friends of Rocky Hills. This group is the fundraising body whose purpose it is to help with some of the financial needs of maintaining such a gem. \$50 will make one a Friend of Rocky Hills. Remember charity begins at home. So let us all support the good causes in our neighborhood. Garden Conservancy/Rocky Hills, P.O. Box 219, Cold Spring, New York 10516 or call (845) 265- 2029.
10. Membership to The Garden Conservancy and a promise to visit with the new member several of the gardens in the 2009 Open Days program. www.gardenconservancy.org
11. All of the above of course, cost some money. But there are gifts you can always give that are not about money at all. You can offer to help a gardener in different ways. A few hours of weeding, help setting up a composting system, assistance in the laying of a new path, pruning, watering, mowing, deadheading, bulb planting, etc. The list is endless. There is something for everyone, old or young. Prior experience is not mandatory. Take it from me; every bit of help is truly welcome and very much appreciated. Best of all, it tops every other gift as you've given the most precious gift of all, the gift of your time.

May every season ahead be filled with peace, joy, beauty and wonder. That is

my wish for each of you.



