Great Gifts for Gardeners

By Maureen O’Connell

It seems as if I was just telling Sam and Tom (you remember them, my two very helpful garden helpers) that there is a hint of fall in the air, and now I am offering ideas for holiday gifts. When I try to imagine gifts for other people, I tend to think of what I would like to receive. So here is my list of gifts most gardeners would love to find under their tree this year.

The most basic item any gardener needs is a good pair of gloves. There are hundreds of them on the market, but they are not all created equally. When I am working with my rose bushes, the best gloves for the job are elbow-length leather ones. They are puncture resistant and provide strength, durability, and comfort, while protecting the forearms from cuts and scratches. You can find them in most garden centers. This year, White Flower Farm offered “gloves for all seasons;” this set of three different designs (touch, grip, and thermal), fits the bill for most garden chores.

Every professional or serious hobbyist needs the tools of his or her trade. Surprise your garden friend with a goody bag of high-quality tools that can handle any job the garden throws you. There are some very cool garden tool bags out there; some are even attached to a little folding garden seat. A beginner’s collection should include a plant and bulb trowel, a hand weeder, a Swoe (better than a hoe), and a pair of pruning shears, preferably made by Felco.

About five years ago, I bought a redwood potting shed from John Speelman at Poolesville Hardware. It is about six feet tall by three feet wide; it has three shelves and an open area for tall tools. It very neatly fits into a small corner of my garage; it could also live outside. It was a very useful purchase; it holds all my tools, fertilizers, and disease and pest spray materials. You can find them also online and in many garden centers.

Does your garden friend love to grow clematis, sweet peas, Morning Glories, or other flowering vines? If so, he or she would love a new, unusual support for them. Several years ago I bought a cedar tuteur for my clematis Josephine from White Flower Farm. Its rot-resistant Western Red Cedar has now weathered naturally to a light silver gray, and Josephine’s lilac petals look great against the gray.

Have you ever admired a beautiful, rambling, powerfully-scented wisteria vine, but you don’t have the space or a strong enough structure to support its heavy vines? Well, consider a tree wisteria. It is not a real tree in the sense that you would find it growing wild in a forest. A wisteria vine, usually Chinese or Japanese, is grafted onto a standard tree trunk and root system. The trunk is as tall as the plant will ever get. This tree is drought tolerant, disease and pest resistant, and adaptable to many soils and conditions. Its crowning glory, though, is its intense fragrance. It needs full sun for about five to six hours a day and very little, if any, fertilizer. Its prime requirement is continual, heavy pruning. If left alone, it will revert back to the way it would like to grow—as a fast-growing vine. This special tree deserves a place of honor in your garden. You can buy them online from several garden centers; I bought mine from White Flower Farm about ten years ago, and every spring, ‘Texas White’ faithfully re-blooms.

Every garden, however small or grand, needs a proper chair or bench. Sam, Tom, and I have several tucked away in shady corners, where we can sit every morning and evening to relax and admire the beauty of the gardens. This year, surprise that special gardener with a teak bench or chair. This wood furniture is the most durable on the market today. It has a life expectancy of seventy-five-plus years, untreated and weathered. Over the years, its color will change to a soft, pinkish gray. There are many bench designs, but I particularly like the Monet, modeled after one the artist had in his garden in Giverny, just outside of Paris. I also love the one originally designed by the twentieth century British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens.

You will need a good book to read while relaxing on your bench. Here are two practical ones that will answer most, if not all, of your gardening questions: *What’s Wrong With My Plant? (And How Do I Fix It?)* by David Peardorff and Kathryn Wadsworth (Timber Press, $24.95), and for your garden bible, *American Horticultural Society’s A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*, by Christopher Brickell, Henry Marc Cathey, American Horticultural Society DK Publishing. This comprehensive reference book is well organized and easy to read. It encompasses hundreds of photographs and entries, while providing you with planting and maintenance information for each plant. You will find yourself referring to it many times.

This is my last garden article and last issue of the *Monocle* for 2010. May you have a joyful holiday season, and I will see you back here in the new year, when we can plan again great thoughts for our wonderful gardens.