

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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HORTICULTURE EDUCATION
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Gifts with Gardening in Mind
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Finding that special holiday gift seems stressful, and coming up with ideas seems exhausting. Gardening-themed gifts are both enjoyable and useful.

My favorite gifts include holiday plants such as poinsettia, Christmas cactus, and amaryllis which brighten long winter days. Even succulents are popular. These and other houseplants are available locally. More information on the care of holiday plants is available at <https://horticulture.ca.uky.edu/sites/horticulture.ca.uky.edu/files/christmasflowers.pdf>. Before purchasing plants, be sure to check and see if the receiver has a plant allergy.

Gifts to help with gardening tasks are useful. Pruners and pruning saws are used to maintain shrubs and trees. The bypass type of pruning tool has a scissors-cutting action that cleanly cuts the stem without crushing it. Pruning saws are designed to cut on the pull stroke. The blades are narrow to fit into tight spaces and still make clean cuts.

Hand pruners are used to cut stems up to three-quarters inch in diameter. Two-handed lopping shears cut branches up to 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter. Pruning saws are recommended

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for removing branches over 1 inch in diameter. Following these guidelines make the tools last longer and result in good, clean cuts that are better for the plant.

Shovels and spades are useful hand tools. Shovels have a concave blade that comes to a point. They are used to dig holes and move soil. Spades on the other hand have a flat blade used for cutting roots, transplanting trees and shrubs, edging beds, and shaping straight-sided trenches.

Garden forks have four thick rectangular or square tines that are used to break up undisturbed garden soil. Spading forks have four flat tines that may have diamond or triangular backs used to turn loose soil. Both are used for turning over compost and digging root crops.

Raised beds make vegetable gardening easier and fit in small spaces. Kits are available for purchase or make your own. Four feet is the widest suggested width of the bed. The best length of the bed depends on the available space, money, and time.

A frame for a raised bed to support the soil may be constructed of untreated wood, stone, concrete block, brick, or recycled plastic boards, or soil may be mounded without a rigid structure. Woods naturally resistant to decay include cedar, redwood, and black locust.

Tall, self-contained raised beds already fabricated are available. They are great for lettuce, spinach, herbs, or pepper plants for example. Some come with a type of clear cover to trap heat to start an early crop or to protect the crop from a late-season frost.

Gift certificates to purchase media to fill the raised bed and for seeds or transplants can complete this project. Information about the planting media for the plants to grow in the raised bed is available at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ID/ID248/ID248.pdf>.

Supplies specifically for growing transplants are useful gifts. These may include a light stand, light bulbs, heat mat, seed starting media, seedling containers, trays to catch water, plastic

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dome to hold in moisture, and a timer for the lights to manage the appropriate day lengths needed by the seedlings. More information about growing transplants can be found within the publication on growing vegetables in Kentucky located at <https://publications.ca.uky.edu/sites/publications.ca.uky.edu/files/ID128.pdf>.

Even though a person must wait to plant them, a collection of vegetable, herb, and flower seeds helps them look forward to the next growing season. Zinnias, sunflowers, and marigolds are easy to grow and can be sown directly into the garden. Vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, peas, beets, beans, and cucumbers, are also easy to grow directly sown into the garden. Tomato, pepper, eggplant, cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower should be seeded indoors and transplanted into the garden at the appropriate time. Share the website link to Plan, Eat, Move, <https://www.planeatmove.com/>, for easy, tested recipes from the University of Kentucky along with the vegetable seeds so the person has ideas of how to use the harvested produce in an entrée for a delicious and healthy meal during the growing season.

Another gift is a battery-operated timer for irrigation lines or soaker hoses. These save water by keeping it from running all night when someone forgets to turn the water off. It's also handy when on vacation for a few days.

Making a compost bin would be another gift idea. Composting yard waste turns it into a good amendment to improve the condition of the soil. Compost bins can be elaborate and made out of wood, or very simple and made out of wire. Ideas for making compost bins and how to compost are available free through the Cooperative Extension Service Office or at the website <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ho/ho75/ho75.pdf>.

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A gift certificate purchased now from a local garden center or nursery can be used in the spring for suggested items such as a wide-brim garden hat, decorative pots, a fountain, or bird feeders. The recipient could also use it for his or her favorite plants.

Free how-to publications with science-based information are available through the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service at the Daviess County office or another county office or at <https://daviess.ca.uky.edu/horticulture>. Topics covered include composting, trees, flowers, fruits, vegetables, turfgrass, and more. Organizing the printed material in a binder keeps the information in place or email links in a special document.

For more gardening gift ideas, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Garden gloves are great to protect hands while gardening.

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