

HOME & GARDEN

Ideal Christmas gifts for your gardener

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

It's always a pleasure to go Christmas shopping for someone who has a hobby and gardeners are particularly easy to buy for because their interests and needs tend to be so broad.

With this column in mind I went out and asked some gardeners what they wanted for Christmas. Elsa Bakalar did not even hesitate before saying, "A load of topsoil that I can use as I need it. And, of course, a load of manure." On another occasion she told me that one of the most useful gifts she had ever received was a Garden Way cart.

In fact I do know of one lucky gardener who did receive a toy dump truck filled with a miniature bag of manure last Christmas. The real load of fertilizer was delivered in the spring.

On a slightly smaller scale an indoor gardener would appreciate a large bale of jiffy mix for starting seedlings or a sack of potting soil. Other consumables that a gardener would find welcome are bales of peat moss, and bags of lime or bone meal.

Other gardeners have grander dreams. Alice Woznak said she wants a greenhouse and her husband just rolled his eyes.

Tom Luck says that if price is no object he would like a Mainline rototiller. He likes Mainline because in addition to the tiller it takes at-

tachments like a cart, cutter bar and a snowblower.

George Bluh also wants a machine — a shredder. In general, however, he doesn't think mechanical gadgets make ideal gifts. "A sturdy, well-designed set of hand tools is incredibly useful," he said and I agree, having found out to dig with tools that bent backwards with the first resistance. A good trowel and hand cultivator are the first essentials. You might like to add a weeding tool that has a long blade for digging out deeply rooted weeds, and a sheepshears for edging flower beds.

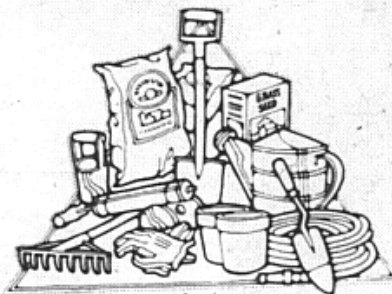
Many tools and gadgets cost less than \$10 or \$15. I need a new pair of grass clippers and pruning shears are a necessity. There is also a special flower cutter that will cut the flower and then it has special edges that will strip a rose of its thorn and crush the bottom of the stem so that it will last longer in water indoors.

Bluh said that actually he hadn't received many gardening gifts but "one of the best things I've ever bought myself is a Warren hoe which has a pointed blade. I use it for cultivating and for planting."

Tom Luck is another supporter of the hoe. He says it is one of his most useful tools, although he is also fond of his four pronged spading fork and his flat-bladed spade.

George had lots of ideas for a gardener. He

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thought grow lights would be a nice luxury and that made me think how many indoor gardeners, with or without grow lights, can use an assortment of flower pots in plastic or clay, or perhaps a really handsome cache pot. He suggested a soil testing kit for the scientifically minded gardener and that reminded me that I still want a rain gauge. A thermometer that records the day's highest and lowest temperatures would also help the gardener who likes to keep records.

And speaking of records, I'm always touting garden notebooks. They can be as simple as a looseleaf, maybe in a nice shade of green, or perhaps a blank book bound in a floral print would tempt a gardener to keep track of observations and flights of fancy as well as more scientific data.

A walk through Agway or a catalog like "Gardener's Eden" will give you dozens of ideas for the gardener in your life. There are prosaic things like jiffy pots or plastic planting trays to more extravagant items like a plastic geodesic greenhouse.

A set of permanent garden markers will eliminate the search for pieces of lath or board to label the rows of broccoli and lettuce. Plastic netting to use for trellising peas and other climbing crops is one of the newest things in garden departments along with wire hoops sold with plastic to turn a garden row into a "caterpillar" greenhouse in the early spring.

If money is short there are also gifts that can be made. I was watching Victory Garden on television and Jim Thompson was using a planting stick to space his seedlings. This was nothing more nor less than a narrow board that was notched at regular intervals so that the gardener could be sure he was spacing his plants properly. If I had one of these it might stop my husband's kibbitzing. He always thinks I am

being very arbitrary when I go out to do my planting.

Tomato towers are a wonderful idea, but they are expensive when bought in the store, but they can be made at a great saving by buying 4 foot wire fencing and making your own.

The proper tool can make any gardening chore easier and gadgets can be great fun, but another present for the gardener is the gift of beauty, perhaps an easy to care for old-fashioned rose or a hundred daffodil bulbs to naturalize on a bank. I'd like a collection of golden day lily bulbs and since I live in Heath I think it's high time I started my own heath and heather garden.

White Flower Farm has a whole selection of heaths and heathers. Calluna vulgaris Blazeway is an 18-inch heather with mauve flowers that bloom in August and September. In the summer its foliage is golden but in the fall it turns to a soft orange-red which makes it especially attractive in the winter garden.

Most of the heaths (ericas) are not as hardy as heather but E.T. alba mollis should do well, even here on our hill. It grows to a height of about 15 inches and from late June to October the dark gray foliage is covered with white blossoms.

No, there really is no shortage of things to buy the gardener. I hope my family is reading this.

Refinishing isn't a science.