

HOME & GARDEN

Christmas gifts: Books for your gardener

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I am a reader so no discussion of Christmas gifts for the gardener is complete for me without a mention of some of the books that are available.

Santa has already made a book drop at my house and I now have my very own copy of Rodale's *Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening*. This 1,236-page compendium covers everything from abella ("small to medium-sized shrubs in the honeysuckle family") to zygotetulum ("a handsome epiphytic orchid") with stops at Luther Burbank, composting, houseplants, panic grass and soil testing along the way.

This book has been my main reference when I needed to find out how far apart to space my cabbage plants or how to raise the phosphorus level in my soil. When Mrs. Gleason, our town librarian, wasn't asking me why I was taking it out again, she was asking when I would bring it back. But no longer. At \$21.95 it is an investment, but I expect my garden to make a fair return.

There are many how-to books on the market. Lewis Hill is a prolific writer of gardening

advice. I have recently seen three of his books and I would enjoy owning any or all of them. First he has a book which demystifies the arcane art of pruning in a volume appropriately called *Pruning Simplified* (Rodale, \$9.95). He gives instructions for pruning every type of plant: trees, shrubs, bushes, hedges, vines, flowers, garden plants, houseplants and even bonsai. A clear text is aided by simple illustrations.

In another volume he discusses *Successful Cold Climate Gardening* (Stephen Greene Press, \$9.95). Up here on my hill that is a constant concern. He touches on how to lengthen the growing season and how to choose cold-resistant varieties of vegetables and fruits as well as cold tolerant trees, evergreens and flowers.

Loving berries as I do, I am always looking for advice on increasing and improving my berry production and Lewis Hill comes to my aid with *Fruits and Berries for the Home Garden* (Garden Way, \$6.95). There is a chapter devoted to apples, plums, pears, cherries, bramble fruits, grapes, nuts, strawberries and more. He gives clear instructions on how and when to perform the different chores required by each

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season, how to improve the soil and how to propagate many plants.

There are all kinds of gardens, salad garden, and flower gardens and for the gardener who is also an enthusiastic cook Rodale has put together *Gourmet Gardening* (\$9.95) which is devoted to the delights of 48 of the less common vegetables like celeriac, spaghetti squash, florence fennel and Egyptian onion. Seed sources, culture requirements and recipes take the gardener from his armchair to his savory dinner plate.

Thallasa Cruso is a favorite of mine and I already own *Making Things Grow* and *Making Things Grow Outdoors* and now there is *Making Vegetables Grow* (VanNostrand, Reinhold, \$6.95). In her engaging way she tells the novice how to plan a garden and offers advice on deciding how large it should be. She then goes on to explain how to choose a good garden site, create compost and improve the soil. Specific instructions are given for many vegetables from asparagus to turnips.

Mel Bartholomew has an approach that may be especially helpful to the novice gardener. He calls it *Square Foot Gardening* (Rodale, \$9.95). He says that "a square foot garden will yield the same harvest as a single row conventional garden, but in one fifth the space." He gives basic directions on improving the soil, rotating crops, succession planting, companion planting and pest control. He also offers advice on incorporating your garden into your landscaping plan. He even has a chapter on simple structures that the gardener can build like cold frames and frames for climbing plants. This is an excellent book for someone who has thought about starting a garden, but has been intimidated by the thought of all the space, equipment and time needed to have a productive garden.

But gardening is not all "how-to." And not all books concern themselves with bare instructions.

One Christmas I received Katherine White's *Onward and Upward in the Garden* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) which is now also out in paperback. I have spent many happy seasons since then considering her opinions on tetraploid flower forms (she disapproves) and old-fashion-

ed roses (she approves). It was she who first told me about Will Tillotson and Roses of Yesterday and Today. A resident of Maine she has battled rough and severe weather like me and never became discouraged only more philosophical.

This book is a collection of essays that appeared in the New Yorker magazine from 1958 to 1970. They often deal with the new seed catalogs and I find it makes a delightful companion to the reading of seed catalogs on dull winter nights when the imagination has already taken flight for the golden afternoons of summer.

A new book I am looking forward to reading is Eleanor Perenyi's *Green Thoughts* (Random House, \$15.50). This book has lots of practical advice as well as personal opinions and it is through other people's opinions that I often find myself making new discoveries and growing myself.

This is just a sampling of the books available at this time of the year, but perhaps it will give you some ideas. I know this is one gardener that is hoping for a new book under the tree as well as that new pair of grass clippers.

Planting living Christmas trees

If you buy a living Christmas tree this year, use care if you want it to survive.

First, pick out a fresh-looking tree, either tubbed or balled and burlapped, at a reliable nursery. If it isn't tubbed, put it into a wooden, plastic, or metal tub.

Water it moderately well but do not drown it. Next, spray all of the foliage with an anti-drying spray. This will prevent the tree from drying out in the house and afterward. Obviously, keep the tree out of the sun and wind.

Dig a hole before the ground is completely frozen and make it large enough to accommodate the roots with ease. Fill the hole with leaves or old straw and cover it to hold them in and prevent freezing. At the same time mix a generous amount of dried cow manure into the pile of good soil that you took out in

order to enrich it. Then flatten the pile.

Cover the soil with a foot of leaves or old straw so that it will not freeze. Then add a plastic sheet or piece of old canvas to hold the leaves down.

After planting, stake or otherwise tie the tree to keep it steady in the winter wind. Also, mulch the soil at least six inches deep, not only over the root ball but around it as well.

By all means plant the tree if you can. But if the location is exposed to drying winds and sun or you positively cannot plant it after it has served its purpose indoors, store the tree in the best location you can find. Garages are bad. The best spot is a corner out of doors which is protected from the sun and wind.

