Christmas Gifts for the Gardener in Your Life
by Debbie Lauer, Bell County Master Gardener

Well the time is almost here. The air has finally cooled; it's almost Thanksgiving and therefore also almost time for the official start of the Christmas shopping season on the day after. I always tell myself that I will start shopping early and not have to fight the crowds but I never seem to get to it until after Turkey Day. If you are like me you have not even begun to think about your shopping list. To help you make a decision for those gardeners on your list here are some suggestions to help you.

Gardening books are always a favorite. Most gardeners have a few and are sure to have several more on their wish list. There are gardening books on just about any aspect of gardening you can think of: roses, herbs, trees, perennials, annuals, bugs, attracting birds, attracting butterflies, native plants, wildflowers, composting, landscaping, orchids, houseplants, gardening guides, plant reference books; well you get the picture. If you know what kind of plants your gardeners prefers this will make you selection easy. A couple hints, be sure to get books that are about gardening in Texas and try to get a peek at your special gardener's library so you don't duplicate a purchase. Neil Sperry's Complete Guide to Texas Gardening is a must have; as is Jill Nokes' How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest. For wildflower enthusiasts Geyata Ajilvsgi's Wildflowers of Texas is a great idea. Sally and Andy Wasowski’s Native Texas Plants: Landscaping Region by Region and Southern Herb Growing by Madalene Hill, Gwen Barclay, and Jean Hardy are also very popular books. The rose enthusiast will be sure to appreciate Dr. William Welch's Antique Roses for the South.

Along the same lines as a book is a gardening journal. This is a fantastic idea as it allows a gardener to document their garden for the coming year. They can take notes on when certain plants were planted and to make sketches of their garden so locations of plants are recorded. Dale Groom's My Texas Garden Gardening Journal, has pages to record weekly progress and space to diagram the garden. There are also features like a place to record where plants were purchased. This journal will help prevent "repeat" mistakes in subsequent years as successes and failures can be noted.

Gardening magazines are also a great idea. Here are few to help you find that perfect fit for your gardener. Texas Gardener is published every two months and has excellent articles, month by month checklists as well as weather forecasts. Gardening events around the state are also listed. Neil Sperry's Gardens is another Texas gardening magazine with great pictures and articles. There are also others like Birds and Blooms for the gardener who loves birds or Garden Design which shows the latest trends in plants, garden art, and furniture; featuring photos of designs of top garden designers from all over the country.

There are also gardening tools and supplies. The variety of these items can be endless; I am sure that you will receive catalogs during this holiday season that will have some of these items or you can go to a local nursery and find them. A gardener can always use a good pair of pruners. Be sure to buy bypass pruners, NOT anvil pruners. You can find them in different sizes, if your gardener is smaller in stature buy pruners designed to fit a smaller hand. Some tools are ergonomically designed. Gardening involves so much repetitive motion that anything that makes the job easier is greatly appreciated. Things like plant stakes, waterproof plant markers, and rooting hormone also called rooting powder are also very useful.

A garden kneeler is a handy thing to have. It provides a padded place for the knees and can be turned over to become a padded seat. When being used as a kneeler the "legs" of the seat double as handles that provide a helping hand in getting up. Some kneelers also come with optional pouches that hang off the handles for a convenient place to put things like pruners, plant ties, trowel, or seed packets. Kneelers usually fold up to be easily stored when not in use.

A little imagination also helps when buying a gift for a gardener. A friend of mine told me of a great gift she received last year. It was a cloth bag with multiple side pockets. In the bag and side pockets were things like a bottle of rooting hormone, empty film canisters and small plastic bags (for seed collection), pruners (for taking cuttings), larger plastic bags (for plant cuttings) gardening gloves, and a trowel. It is a great starter kit for any gardener! My friend keeps hers in her car so she is equipped whenever she runs
into an opportunity to collect plant cuttings or seeds.

Of course plants are always on the list for any gardener. This time of year is the perfect time to plant trees and shrubs. If your gardener has wanted a special tree or decorative shrub, now is the perfect time of year to treat them to it. Another great gift is a start from a plant in your garden or seeds of a plant that your gardener friend has admired. If that plant has a "history" be sure to pass along its story; plants passed from friend to friend or down from family members are especially cherished.

If your gardener has lost a loved one this year it may be possible to have a tree planted as a memorial for that loved one. Inquire at local city parks and gardens to see if this is possible in your town. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin also has a program for tribute gifts.

My last suggestion is garden art items. These take the form of whimsical stepping stones, wind chimes, statues, personalized garden rocks and a myriad of other decorative planters, pots, sundials, gazing balls, signs, or garden flags. As with any other gift that you select for the holiday season take into account the likes and dislikes of your gardener, their personality, and I am sure that you will come up with an idea that will be very special to them.