**Christmas Presents for the Gardener**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

**Texas A&M Water Conservation and Technology Center**

Here are some last minute ideas for Christmas gifts for the gardener on your list.

The easiest gift to arrange and obtain is a gift certificate. Personalize it and reveal thoughtfulness by purchasing it at your gardener’s favorite retail nursery.

In the note with the gift, remind the gardener that the gift certificate allows them to select the plants that fit into the landscape and to pick them up when it is convenient for the gardener to do the planting.

In addition to plants, there are many other great gifts for gardeners at neighborhood garden centers.

Garden gloves are always useful. If your gardener is a rose gardener or grows blackberries, consider the long sleeve gloves that protect the forearms from thorns.

Tools, such as a high quality shovel, rake or pruners are always appreciated.

Pre-cut raised bed gardens are a neat gift. For someone that is getting older and having trouble bending down to a low garden, purchase a kit for a garden at 3 feet high. People in wheelchairs can even manage a garden if the raised bed is 3 feet tall. To make this gift even more special, purchase the appropriate number of bags of soil and build the garden for your special gardener.

Bird baths and bird feeders are always a welcome addition to the landscape. They can be simple or works of art. Many local nurseries even have fountains. The running water really attracts the birds.

With the wonderful weather we have in autumn through spring, lawn furniture makes it easier to enjoy your flowers and the birds that visit your bird baths and feeders.

Your local nursery may not carry a garden tiller, but your local hardware store or lawn equipment dealer does. I have a Mantis tiller designed specifically for raised beds that is one of my favorite gardening accessories. It is lightweight and not built for tilling heavy clay or caliche, but it is great for incorporating compost into a raised bed garden. From what I hear from other gardeners, there are several brands that start as easily and operate as effectively as my Mantis.

Another gift option that is well appreciated by gardeners is garden books. There is a large selection of books, including some new this year, that target Texas gardeners.

Look for *Texas Fruit and Vegetable Gardening* by Greg Grant. The book is new for 2012 and is a good, basic text for any gardener, but it is especially useful for a gardener new to our area or venturing into vegetable gardening for the first time. Greg Grant has a charming writing style as he weaves his East Texas and San Antonio gardening experiences into his presentation of the basic information.

My favorite Greg Grant book, and the most useful, is one he wrote with Roger Holmes called *Home Landscaping Texas*. It breaks down do-it-yourself home landscaping into chewable bites.

Another Greg Grant offering to consider is *Heirloom Gardening in the South*, written with Bill Welch (Texas A&M University Press, $29.95).

*Heirloom Gardening in the South* begins by discussing the various cultural influences in southern gardening, including Native American, Spanish, African, French, German, English and Italian. It goes on to include several chapters on special topics. One of the more interesting sections is “Natives, Invasives, Cemeteries and Rustling.” Daffodils have a huge potential in our gardens that is largely unfilled. The chapter “Naturalizing Daffodils” will help us change that situation. The key is to use the heirloom selections. The detailed accounts of the large number of heirloom plants and the design sector will help the gardener seeking a resource for creating their own heirloom garden. *Heirloom Gardening in the South* will also provide a good read for folks that enjoy traveling through the south to view gardens, and for those readers that seek out historical accounts. The book provides excellent horticultural information, good writing and affection for every part of the gardening spectrum. It is a good read.

Here are more of my favorite titles:

Neil Sperry's *Complete Guide to Texas Gardening*

*Attracting Birds to Southern Gardens* by Pope, Odenwald, Fryling

Sally and Andy Wasowskis’ *Native Texas Plants*

*Butterfly Gardening for the South* by Geyata Ajilvsgi

*Texas Trees* by Paul Cox and Patty Leslie

*Trees, Shrubs and Cacti of South Texas* by Evelitt, Drawe and Lonard

Scott Ogden’s *Gardening Success with Difficult Soils*

*Drip gardening* by Harris and Csehil, visit thehillcountrygardener.com