

GARDEN GIFTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

By Joan Hauser

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Chanukah, or Kwanzaa, the odds are you will be giving holiday gifts to those near and dear as well as bringing them as hostess gifts to holiday parties. Now's the time to plan ahead to create gifts that will share your love of gardening.

Think about what's still available from your own garden: greens of various kinds, still some plants to divide and pot to give away, decorative dried flower arrangements made with "finds" from the woods and your own yard. Brilliantly colored leaves are abundant for arrangements and craft projects. (For specific information on this and all craft projects, check on line.)

You can start now to root your most prolific indoor plants and set them in pots. Add a tag with plant name and cultivation tips. Put them in clay pots plus saucers or create more decorative pots by painting other kinds of containers. For dried flower arrangements, use an old vase or mug or create your own container. Add a gold cherub or two or other holiday decoration and a big bow.

If you buy bulbs for forcing indoors and get them started now, green should be showing as the holidays near. If not, precise instructions will help the recipient care for them and have the fun of waiting for their own glimpse of green. An amaryllis



is always stunning, but sweet scented hyacinths and narcissus are very cheery in the midst of winter. In lieu of dirt, use marbles, polished stones, or even pebbles from the beach. Be sure to steep those in fresh water, drain, and re-steep many times to eliminate all salt. A painted coffee can or old plastic container can be painted or stenciled and topped by a bow. Be imaginative. Old bowls, teapots, mugs and other kitchen extras can look surprisingly interesting. You can even cover a cardboard box with interesting wrapping paper, line with a green garbage bag and Sphagnum Moss. Insert the pot or pots. Always include a description of the plant and growing tips. Those who are clever can make wreaths and terrariums to give to their friends.

With less effort, a bowl of seasonal greens--holly and pines--is a gift that will add to anyone's decor. A few sprigs of mistletoe, tied into an attractive bundle, complete with a tack to stick it to the ceiling will make any hostess smile.

Small garden gifts are always welcome to the dedicated gardener. Joyce Chen scissors are under \$25 and a boon to all. They are the ones I carry around with me for light pruning, dead heading, and flower collection. Red is a great color because if you drop them, you can usually find them again. A good trowel is also a superb gift. Pick your favorite one and purchase a few for friends. The price range varies greatly depending upon your choice. Tie the handle with a bright ribbon and add a tag explaining why you prefer this par-



ticular one. Purchases now at sale prices at your local nursery or on line can make great garden gifts--especially in the dead of winter when every gardener is waiting for the spring to re-appear.

Clever packaging can make even the most mundane pair of garden gloves enticing. Part of the secret in creating beautiful gifts is their presentation. A personal comment about the item, directions for use if applicable, and identification of all plants should be included. If you're artistic or good with the computer, make up a similar heading for each tag such as "Green Wonders" or "Secret Gardens"

Baskets are an easy way to present your gift. It's too late now, but next year you can collect seeds from your favorite plants, put them in attractive envelopes with pictures and personal directions, add a book on planting or garden layout, and, if you feel generous, a small trowel and nestle them all in a basket, using tissue paper to settle everything in and bows to decorate. An elegant and functional gift for any gardener! An stunning garden basket can be created with a wide variety of objects You can purchase seed packets on line or use a pot pourri of garden-related items--gloves, books, clippers, a digital camera to take garden pictures,knee pads, a small potted plant plus whatever else strikes your fancy.

