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A crop of worthy gift ideas for gardeners

Things for their hands and imaginations will make them happy



MARK CULLEN PHOTO

"Bees Make the Best Pets" is among the new books that would make great gifts.

By: [Mark Cullen](#) Gardening, Published on Fri Dec 19 2014

Here is the current edition of my annual suggestions for the gardeners on your Christmas list.

- Think green:

Gardeners grow stuff. They read about it, they wallow in the dirt (in a good way), share their success stories and they dream of a better garden no matter their current success.

A trip to your local hardware store or garden centre reveals a plethora of great gift ideas — the hand-tool section offers quality pruners, stainless steel weed diggers, and (my favourite) scoops that move a large volume of soil without all of the effort of a small trowel.

The glove aisle reveals great improvements in glove design, especially for women. It is true that many female gardeners enjoy a manicure from time to time and as a result they like to protect their hands, fingers and (most importantly) nails with gloves that feature reinforced finger tips, tough material on the palms and water resistance throughout. Spring-planting soil is almost always wet and “scratching” is necessary to get the hole just right for planting. That is where the reinforced finger tips come in.

Speaking of pruners, look for a good gardening knife and sharpener. It is amazing how often I use my pocket knife to open bags, remove lower leaves from lettuce, chard and spinach plants, open seed packets and even to scrape dirt off of something important like my hand pruners (there they are again!). There is a new sharpener on the market that protects your knuckles on the downstroke *and* provides an excellent edge to all cutting tools: a [Mark's Choice All-Purpose Tool Sharpener](#) for less than \$20 — you can't go wrong.

Wander into the seed section and look over the herb-growing kits. These are easy to grow in any sunny window, despite the low angle of our winter sun. You will also find “cat grass” kits for the cat loving gardeners on your list. It is so easy to grow and every cat loves it.

Speaking of seeds and buying them, unless you know your gardening friends really well, it is best not to guess what vegetables or flowers they would like to grow next spring. Better to defer to a gift card and let your gardening friends choose early in the New Year. Perusing the seed racks is a fun way for gardeners to waste some time mid winter. I know I'll be there.

- Read:

Closer to home there are wonderful publications available in hard copy and online. *Canadian Gardening* is the No. 1 publication of its kind and, chances are, a good gardener already has access to it — a gift subscription is a good option.

Not as well-known and newer on the block is *Garden Making*, a Canadian publication that won the prestigious Gold Award for best overall magazine from the Garden Writers Association. This is big news in the gardening world, indeed. *Garden Making* had to compete with similar magazines from across the continent. Have a look at gardenmaking.com.

There is no better new year reading than the *Harrowsmith Almanac*. It is a classic, filled with information that all of us really need: weather, folklore, country-living tips for city people, gardening tips and a couple of articles by yours truly. It's fun and packed with info. For only \$5.95 you can't go wrong. Available at Home Hardware and independent garden centres.

This year there's no shortage of great books:

Bees Make the Best Pets, “all the buzz about being resilient, collaborative, industrious, generous and sweet — straight from the hive.” Jack Mingo, Conari Press. Recently [reviewed in this column](#)

The Edible City, Toronto's Food from Farm to Fork, edited by Christina Palassio and Alana Wilcox. A compendium of essays focusing on the growing of food and the “food culture” that surrounds it. Look for my favourite short essay by Lorraine Johnson, “Revisiting Victory: Gardens past, garden future.” Coach House Books.

Therapeutic Landscapes, an Evidence-based Approach to Designing Healing Gardens and Restorative Outdoor Spaces. By Clare Cooper Marcus and Naomi A. Sachs. Published by Wiley Press.

Taming Wildflowers, Bringing the Beauty and Splendour of Nature's Blooms into your own Backyard. Hands-on experience for more than 25 years has taught author Miriam Goldberger a thing or two. Great pictures, too. St. Lynn's Press.

Growing Urban Orchards, the Ups, Downs and How-Tos of Fruit Tree Care in the City. If you thought that a tree was just a tree, this book will expand your mind into the multi-functional and multi-dimensional category of fruiting trees. For shade, atmospheric cooling, community gathering, and of course for food. Susan Poizner knows of what she writes. Published by Orchard People.

The Star's own Sonia Day has been busy banging out edgy, colourfully written work (isn't all of her work edgy and colourful?) and this year she did not disappoint. Look for *Deer Eyes*, Sonia's first novel. A suspenseful tale about a deer hunter who meets a botanical artist from New York. Intriguing

— and in a way only Sonia can pull off. Self-published.

For Kids: *What Pumpkins Dream*. By Jeff Kendall and Clare Galloway. This book is about letting go, acceptance of our own place in the world and nourishment. It is fun and well illustrated. Self-published.

For reference: you cannot beat *The Toronto Gardener's Journal*. This is a gardener's calendar, reference to organizations of a "for profit" and "not for profit" nature, media outlets for gardening (including this column), a place for photos and a chart of relative frost dates. You can't live without it. Produced year after year by Margaret Bennet-Alder. She does not disappoint. Available online or at Sheridan Nurseries. Go to torontogardenbook.com.

My most recent book is not about gardening. I have written 21 books now and this biography of Hugh Beaty's life, titled *Extra Ordinary*, is a first. Hugh, 96, is a D-Day veteran and lives in the same house that he was born in. He has had a full and fascinating life. Twenty dollars will buy you this biography and all of the proceeds go directly to SHARE Agriculture Foundation (which he helped to start up 35 years ago). Go to shareagfoundation.org to order a copy. It is a quick, entertaining and informative read.

Merry Christmas and remember: Blessed is the giver.

Question of the Week

I bought a cyclamen at the grocery store and I have no idea how to keep it alive. Can you help?

Place the plant in a cool location indoors. Cyclamen like to be slightly drying between watering. Provide indirect sun while in bloom to prolong the blossom time. Use 20-20-20 mixed at half-strength every 3 weeks. Give cyclamen a rest when out of flower: cut back on watering and place in direct sunshine.

Mark Cullen is an expert gardener, author, broadcaster and garden editor of Reno and Decor magazine. Get his free monthly newsletter at markcullen.com, and watch him on CTV Canada AM every Wednesday at 8:45 a.m. Follow him on Twitter @MarkCullen4 and Facebook.