

Gifts For The Gardener

Mary Jane Frogge
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Need an original or unique gift idea? Here are some gift suggestions for the gardener in the family or someone who just appreciates the outdoors.

Holiday plants are always a welcome gift to any home. They add color and holiday accents to interior surroundings. The traditional red poinsettias are popular, as are the newer flower colors of pink, blue, white and yellow. Other possibilities are Christmas cactus, red gloxinia and kalanchoe.

The outdoor gardener might like to receive a certain tool to make the job of spring gardening easier. Pruning tools, like hand shears and small saws, are easier to wrap and may be needed later this winter.

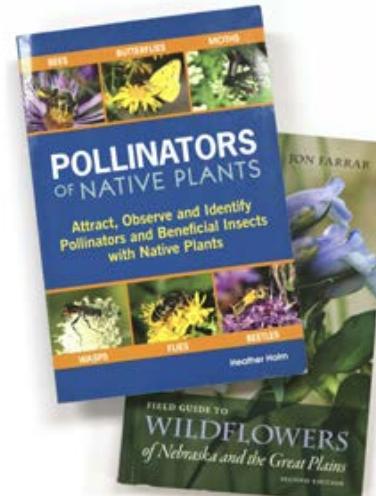
Do not overlook the possibility of a gardening magazine or plant book as a gift. Many larger book stores have well stocked sections on these and related topics. Garden centers and nurseries also offer a variety of titles on individual plants as well as cultural practices. Someone with a new home might like a book on plant selection and landscaping, while people with

a well-established garden and landscape might better use information on maintenance and pruning practices.

Children love to garden and be outside too. Child-sized tools and gloves are available for them to use. Other items to consider are fairy garden items, flower press, worm composting bin, stepping stone kit and seeds of their favorite vegetables or flowers to plant in a garden just for them.

If you have a non-gardening friend or relative you want to introduce to gardening, consider a total package with plant, container and growing media, along with a book on plant care. Gardening kits are available too. A unique gift would be a Bonsai rock garden or a culinary herb garden kit.

There are many gift ideas for people who like to spend their time at the many state parks in the area. To make their adventure more enjoyable, consider giving them a 2020 state park car pass to get into the park, a compass and identification books on wild flowers, birds, insects, butterflies, trees, tracks or mammals. Other useful items would include binoculars to look for things far away, pocket magnifier to see small things close up, sports or explorer's



watch, water bottle for refreshment, hiking boots, sun screen and insect repellent.

Gifts for people who appreciate the outdoors in their own back yard might like bird feeders with birdseed or a compost bin. Water features have also become very popular. Consider giving a water garden kit with a fountain. Other gifts might be a bird bath, bird or bat house, butterfly raise/release kit, outdoor thermometer, rain gauge, wild flower or native grass seed.

Some people may just wish to sit back, relax and enjoy the outdoors. Gifts for them may include a porch swing, garden bench, hammock and a subscription to NEBRASKAland magazine.

GARDEN GUIDE

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH

Mary Jane Frogge, Extension Associate, Lancaster County

November and December is a good time to start reviewing your garden notes to help with next year's plans.

Clean power tools of all plant material and dirt. Replace worn spark plugs, oil all necessary parts and sharpen blades. Store all tools in their proper place indoors, never outdoors where they will rust over the winter.

Check fruits, vegetables, corms and tubers you have in storage. Sort out any that show signs of rot and dispose of them.

Minimize traffic on a frozen lawn to reduce winter damage.

Winter is a good time to inspect trees and shrubs for bagworm capsules. Remove and destroy them to reduce next year's pest population.

A home weather station that includes a minimum-maximum thermometer, a rain gauge and a weather log is a good gift for a gardener.

Remove all mummified fruit from fruit trees and rake up and destroy those on the ground. Also, rake and dispose of apple and cherry leaves. Good sanitation practices reduce insects and diseases the following season.

Be sure not to store apples or pears with vegetables. The fruits give off ethylene gas which speeds up the breakdown of vegetables and will cause them to develop off-flavors.

African violets do well when potted in small pots. A good general rule is to use a pot one-third the diameter of the plant. Encourage African violets to bloom by giving them plenty of light. They can be in a south window during dark winter months. They bloom beautifully under fluorescent lights.

Clean and fix all hand tools. Repaint handles or identification marks that have faded over the summer. Sharpen all blades and remove any rust.

After the ground freezes, mulch small fruit plants such as strawberries. One inch of straw or leaves is ideal for strawberries.

High-Quality Child Care Depends on Effective Family Engagement

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Creating Opportunities for Parent Partnerships

Opening the doors to meaningful contacts and connections with parents is a fundamental piece in building relationships with families. Early childhood professionals who insure this is done well and in accordance with best practices are getting to know their families well. They understand the backgrounds and special talents and skills that their family clientele bring with them and they work to incorporate these gifts into activities and learning in their child care homes and centers.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) outlines six principles of and also gives insight to specific ways early childhood programs can meet this standard of excellence in their day-to-day practices.

Six Principles of Family Engagement Recognized by NAEYC

1. Families participate in decisions and goal setting — Invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child. This can be done through initial intake questionnaires, regular parent teacher conferences and a consistent staff person to follow the family throughout the program.

2. Teachers and programs engage families in two way communication — Face to face, written and online communication that is both school and family initiated (and in

the family's preferred language), invites a dialogue about the child's educational experiences as well as what is happening in the early childhood center.

3. Reciprocal relationships

Staff are connecting with families to learn about their lives, communities and cultures, and work to intentionally integrate this into the curriculum and instruction. Child care programs work to help families share some of their own special skills, talents and knowledge and invite them to take an active role in the school environment.

4. Learning activities at home and the community

Programs are educating families about child growth and development and connecting families to other services available in the community to support their child's education. Many times communities have free or low cost events for families with young children.

5. Families are involved in Program decision making

Family members are asked to serve on committees and boards that help make decisions to shape the policies of the program. Families have input on hiring of personnel, admission policies and menus, to name a few. These committee members can also lead the way in raising funds for special projects.

6. Programs implement a comprehensive program-level system for family engagement

Programs are intentional in reaching out to families in a variety of ways (newsletters, email, etc.). Teachers are given support and training in effective family engagement strategies including



gave this advice on creating parent partnerships:

Listening Conferences

Prior to the start of school, invite parents to do the talking at a special parent-teacher conference. The idea is to engage the family before school starts to gain valuable new information about the child and family, which can be incorporated into the learning environment.

Conference Artifact

Activity — Another helpful strategy to learn about children at conferences is to invite the parents to share one artifact or item that has a special meaning to their child. When parents share their story about the item, it gives them a voice in the meeting, and provides the teacher with important insight into who the child is.

The Buffett Institute is dedicated to research, practice, policy and outreach initiatives to improve the early life experiences of children from birth to age 8. Check out their website at <http://buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu>.

What strategies are you using to engage families in your early childhood care and education programs?

Upcoming Early Childhood Trainings

Nebraska Extension teaches several early childhood development classes for child care providers. Listed are upcoming classes held at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln (unless location otherwise noted). For additional information or to sign up, contact Jaci Foged at jfoged2@unl.edu or 402-441-7180.

Emergency Preparedness for Child Care Providers — Mondays, Nov. 25 and Dec. 2, 5:30–8:30 p.m. Cost is \$10. Must attend both sessions. Register online at <https://ecrecords.education.ne.gov/Calendar.aspx>.