**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**Holiday Gifts for Gardeners**

There are lots of great gifts available for gardeners. Most San Antonio gardeners use raised beds.

Raised bed gardeners cannot utilize a full size tiller but there are small and light versions of tillers that work very well in the limiting confines of a raised bed. The one I have is a Mantis tiller but there are several other high quality brands. The Mantis sells for $299 to $499 depending on the model and retailer. They can be purchased online or at garden equipment retailers. It works very well for incorporating additions of compost and crop residue into the soil within the bed.

A gift certificate at your gardener’s favorite retail nursery is always well appreciated. The certificate allows the gardener to pick his or her own gift at the time when they can use it. This is especially important if they are doing a new planting. With a gift certificate they can select a plant that fits into their plan when they have the time to plant it.

Gift certificates work well at horticultural supply stores as well. The recipient can use the certificate to purchase mulch, compost, landscape soil, and other accessories. The material can be picked up in the gardener’s truck or the store will deliver the bulk material to the landscape. Among the firms to purchase this gift are Keller Material, Fertile Garden Supply, Garden Ville, and New Earth.

Aeration and top dressing is important to lawn health in our area. A homeowner can do the job themselves but there are at least two firms that will do the job for you or the recipient of the gift. Contact True Green Chem Lawn at “[www.trugreen.com](http://www.trugreen.com)” or Real Green Lawns at “[www.realgreenlawns.com](http://www.realgreenlawns.com)”. This service is a thoughtful and unusual gift.

Does your gardener feed the birds? If he or she does or would if the squirrels could be controlled, consider buying them an “Absolute” brand steel bird feeder with weight sensitive perch. The squirrels can’t chew through it and the feed hopper closes to anything heavier than a cardinal if that is the way you set the weight sensitive perch. They work very well. Absolute steel feeders sell at $29.95 and up.

If you gardener appreciates the value of birds in the landscape but doesn’t need a squirrel proof bird feeder your might want to consider a purple martin house complete with telescoping pole. It is a more expensive gift ranging from $100 to over $200.

There are a number of memberships that your gardener may appreciate. A membership to the Botanical Garden or the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center will allow access to those facilities and support their programs. Both facilities offer training and volunteer opportunities. The membership gift may be especially significant for retired gardeners looking for a way to link their hobby to volunteer service. Both organizations offer docent training and volunteer service opportunities. Buy the membership as the gift and mention the volunteer opportunities in the card.

There are other great volunteer service opportunities in gardening as well. You could provide a scholarship to the Master Gardeners or the Master Naturalists. The training is relatively expensive at $220 respectively, but worth every dollar of the cost. They have more applicants than slots and a commitment is required so your scholarship is not automatic access to the training but it would be a wonderful gift.

Books also make good gifts for gardeners during the Holidays.

If your gardener is just beginning a gardening library you can consider Neil Sperry’s “Complete Guide to Texas Gardening”, William Welch’s “Perennial Garden Color”, and or Greg Grant and Roger Holmes’ “Home Landscaping Texas.” They are all under $40. Paul Cox and Patty Leslie’s “Texas Trees a Friendly Guide” is less expensive. For a stocking stuffer find a copy of the “San Antonio Landscaping Care Guide” at $8 a copy, it is a wonderful gift.

William Welch and Greg Grant have a new book out in 2011. It is titled “Heirloom Gardening in the South: Yesterday’s Plants for Today’s Gardens” and sells for $29.95. It has excellent photos, is well written and the information is top notch. Dr. Welch is a long time professor of ornamental horticultural at Texas A & M. Greg Grant now works for Stephen F. Austin University, but he used to be the Extension Agent for Horticulture here in San Antonio. Both are good writers and recognized as leaders in the field.