

Shop Near Home

If you are a gardener and holiday shopping for another gardener, there is no point in my suggesting you 'take it easy'. Gardeners by definition seem compelled to plant one more seed, pull one more weed, or drive miles for one more gift! Change your ways friends shop close to home. You can find marvelous gifts without tangling with hoards of shoppers.

For bird lovers on your list, check out unexpected sources for feeders, birdhouses, birdbaths. I have a large lovely glass birdbath from the hospital gift shop. I was concerned about the water freezing and cracking and had planned to put it in the garage for the winter. The season's first hard frost caught me by surprise but the water froze and thawed without harm to the glass. That night I did lose the budded Christmas cactus that had spent the summer half buried in the flowerbed. I replanted roots with hope but may have to ask the friend who gave me this one for another piece of her aged plant.

We deplore the superfluous 'stuff' we accumulate and then go out and buy more of the same for our friends who are too polite to tell us if they can't plant it, wear it or eat it they don't need it. Plants are wonderful. Bulbs are even better since you tuck them into the ground and they take care of themselves. Houseplants can survive a degree of neglect of course but if you leave home for weeks they may die and leave you a legacy of guilt.

Have you considered giving the components of a raised vegetable bed as a special present? The directions would be a plus and a few hours of 'consulting' and help would be sheer bliss. Gloucester and Mathews have many places to find homemade preserves, local honey, even handmade jewelry. There is something so festive about a necessity, like gardening gloves, that arrive in a more elegant version. One feels so honored if a gift is home made, either from a shop or a friend's kitchen. Perhaps you have a friend who is saving for a special tool and would welcome a check reserved for that fund.

Young people, like street kiosks, prefer cash and if you like your checkbook to balance in a timely fashion, cash is best. A donation to a worthy cause in the name of a friend has to be done carefully. It is safer if the person honored is no longer among the living, otherwise good intentions may backfire.

When my children were small and their far-away grandmothers insisted they wanted nothing, a friend and I gathered up our children and a collections of brightly wrapped gifts and visited a nearby nursing home. The residents especially enjoyed the little children but the grandmothers thought it strange.

Do you have a friend whose truck might appreciate a gift certificate to the carwash? Have you the skills to decorate a potting bench or can you paint daisies on a porch chair, ladybugs on a pot?

Holiday shopping is not rocket science but it is not easy. Some gardeners may love a posh sunscreen product, others would prefer a season's supply of "Off" and save the sales slips for that relative who traditionally and automatically heads for the exchange counter early morning, December 26.