

Gardening Books for Holiday Gift Giving

by Marlys Bell

Thanksgiving has been celebrated; now it is time to search for personalized holiday gifts that will be appreciated by the people on your list. If any of them are avid gardeners, or new to the Mother Lode, one of these great books just might be the perfect choice:

1. "Sharing The Knowledge - Gardening in the Mother Lode, Book 2," is a compilation of articles written by Master Gardeners and other local experts published by the Union Democrat from 2006-2011. Its information is research- and experience-based and specific to the conditions and challenges of gardening in the Mother Lode. Advice and suggestions for dealing with animals (deer, gophers, dogs, cats, etc.) bugs, water shortages, soil deficiencies and plant diseases are included. Articles focus on garden design, sustainable living, edible and healthy gardening. It is available for \$25 at the Tuolumne County Master Gardener Office at 52 N. Washington Street, Foothill Business Cards and The Mountain Bookshop, all in Sonora. Call (209) 533-5695 for more information.

2. "The Dry Gardening Handbook - Plants and Practices for a Changing Climate," by Olivier Filippi is a coffee-table gardening book that is as beautiful as it is practical. It zeros in on plants that thrive in Mediterranean climates (like ours) and need no supplemental water if the right varieties are selected for the location. Unique is the author's drought-tolerance scale (from 1-6), suggesting the number of months the plant should be able to survive without water, once established. In addition to picking the right plants, suggestions about planting and watering necessary to the plants' survival the first year are invaluable. The fabulous pictures and the French author's 20-year focus on drought-tolerant plants are pertinent to the Foothills, while also placing us in the larger context of Mediterranean gardening.

3. "Drought Resistant Planting - Beth Chatto's Gravel Garden," is also about gardening successfully without supplemental water. For those fond of English gardens and gardening journals, this is an engrossing read while offering relevant information for Mother Lode gardens. (Beth Chatto lives in an area in England that averages 20 inches of rain a year - equal in summer and winter-- compared to almost 33 inches for Tuolumne County.) In addition to reducing supplemental water use, Chatto's lifelong pursuit in creating thriving gardens where the soil is shallow, rocky with sedimentary stone (a condition common in the foothills) is inspiring.

4. "The New Sunset Western Garden Book-The Ultimate Gardening Guide," published in 2012, is the 9th edition of Sunset's Western Garden Book. It's worth acquiring even if the person on your list already has an earlier edition. There are 500 additional plants, more varieties for many species, expanded sections on edibles and plants for unique situations (called Plant Finder). The book provides "how to" information on topics like growing vines, succulents, ornamental grasses, annuals, etc. "Care tips" and "flags" note what part of the plant attracts bees, butterflies and other wildlife, as well as the parts that might be poisonous and under what circumstances. There is a section called "Gardening from Start to Finish." A major improvement in the plant illustrations of the Plant Encyclopedia are color pictures, not sketches, making the plants easier to identify.

5. “Free-Range Chicken Gardens - How to Create a Beautiful, Chicken-Friendly Yard” by Jessi Bloom, is written for those interested in introducing chickens into a more self-reliant lifestyle. It provides all the information needed to make free-range chickens a successful venture, including how to manage the environment so the chickens eat what you want, instead of your favorite plants; the likelihood of predators; housing, food and water strategies; as well as selecting the breeds best for various purposes. The irresistible chicken pictures and tips on training them to “come” and “sit” make them seem like the new best pets. They are entertaining, productive, in terms of producing eggs, and capable of the ultimate sacrifice, food for the family. This book also emphasizes other chicken contributions: providing fertilizer, eating weeds, bugs and other critters. These are reasons to keep them even after their egg-bearing days are over.

UC Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners have donated these books to the Tuolumne County Library. You can preview them there before making a purchase. Be prepared to order two copies so that you have a copy for yourself. Or get them early so you can read them before you give them away. HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Marlys Bell is experimenting with plants that do not require supplemental water and other sustainable gardening practices in her demonstration garden in Columbia, Ca.