

Gardening Articles for week ending 8<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2014

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## CHRISTMAS GARDENING SHOPPING

Christmas is getting very near with only about 6 weeks till Xmas week.

Many of you will have already started putting a lot of thought into what gifts they would like to give and some will have completed most of their Christmas shopping already.

Others like myself are still thinking what to give to someone that is so hard to buy for.

A gift that is perfect is one that brings pleasure to the receiver as well as the giver.

This means giving a gift that has really been thought about and often will have some personal input from the giver.

For example young children making something, or drawing a picture, to give to their grandparents are treasures to be carefully stored and enjoyed for years.

Perennial plants are like that, they keep giving for years making them excellent gift choices for loved ones and friends.

I know this because people will phone me asking about a plant that they were given in the past that is not faring so well and they need to revive it because it was a special gift.

Think about this; a young couple with a family are given an apple tree to plant on their section for Xmas. Within a few years that tree is producing a great harvest of fresh, healthy apples for the family to enjoy. As long as that tree is providing an annual harvest the giver will be remembered, even from beyond the grave.

I know of roses that were gifts 30 to 40 years ago still producing an abundance of blooms each year given by a mother or grandparents, long passed but cherished in memory through the annual flowering.

Fruit trees, roses or a specimen plant gift can make the giver, in a sense, immortal for a long time.

This Christmas think gardening and the pleasure plus health benefits it can have for the receiver.

Besides you can contribute not only with your money but also with your labour in making the gift more personal.

Here are a few ideas starting with a glasshouse either A-frame or lean-to they come as kits and you can help put it together for the receiver. I recommend a glass, glasshouse as they will last for a life time and only need panes replaced if broken.

I have 3 glasshouses, one a lean to, one a 2 x 3 metres and the last a old Eden Conservatory, all of

which are over 40 years old and going strong.

A glasshouse for a person or family that loves to garden creates a new dimension to their gardening.

It allows growing out of season tomatoes and capsicum, perfect for germinating seeds and striking cuttings, ideal for growing those more tropical plants that won't do well outdoors in your climate.

There is nothing better on a miserable winter's day than to be pottering around in your nice warm glasshouse.

More information about glasshouses can be found in my recent book *Wallys Glasshouse Growing for New Zealand*.

How about a raised garden for an elderly parent or a young family to grow vegetables in?

You can construct an ideal one on site using roofing iron and 100 x 100mm posts (painted to keep the chemicals sealed)

The structure just sits on the ground (can even be on concrete) it makes an excellent place to grow vegetables, once it has been filled to two thirds with organic waste and compost.

(My book *Gardening & Health* explains the process.)

Next to consider is a compost maker and by far the best are the tumbler ones as they will convert organic waste to compost in the quickest time.

I purchased one some time ago as I wanted a way of making some use out of my dog's toilets.

Having just about all concrete outside the warehouse (where we live above) means a daily poo collection.

The tumbler I purchased has their droppings along with green waste, kitchen scraps and spent compost mixed together, garden lime is added along with tiger worms that I have in abundance.

The end result is an interesting compost which I recently placed in one of my raised gardens and have let the weeds grow to further make use of the dog manure.

It's funny that any manure from chickens, horses etc I happily put into a vegetable garden but with dog/cat manure I hesitate to go direct. Even though I know under established trees and shrubs it certainly feeds the plants very well. (Maybe it's the meaty thing)

A worm farm is also another excellent gardening gift producing worm casts and worm pee to the benefit of your gardens as well as recycling all kitchen green wastes.

A rose in a container makes a lovely gift and now is the time to purchase and pot up.

You need, one bush or standard rose, one container that is about 20 litres or more, a bag of compost, a punnet of trailing lobelia or alyssum.

Make sure the container selected is either straight up and down or that the top is wider than the base with no middle bit wider than the top. (The rose has to be removed and root pruned every 2-3 years and if the top is more narrow than any other part you have to smash the container to remove.)

Fill the container with purchased compost to about half full and place some Sheep Manure pellets, blood & bone, Rok Solid and Neem Granules before adding the rose removed from its bag or pot.

The final height should be about 2-3cm from the rim to allow for food and watering.

Plant the lobelia or alyssum around the edge so they will trail over. Not only does it make it more decorative but the foliage helps reduce moisture loss from mix and they certainly let you know when the mix is drying out. Place the rose in a good light shelter spot outside till you are ready to wrap and give.

A final touch can be spraying the leaves with Vaporgard to make them really green and shiny.

Similar can be done with a fruit tree but then the container wants to be about 50 litres or more and instead of planting flowers around the rim go for either a herb such as parsley, thyme or basil.

The fruit tree can be any variety you would like to give from citrus, feijoa, to pip or stone fruit.

Dwarf types are good but not necessary as they all need root pruning in the future.

Annual flowers or herbs can be potted into nice containers using compost as the growing medium.

Pot up now with colour spots or herb plants then they should be putting on a really good show about Xmas time. Children can help potting up for grandparents and then can proudly say they did it.

Inexpensive and very much appreciated.

Garden shops these days have lots of interesting nick knacks and gift ideas besides their normal lines of plants and things. Soaps, cosmetics, bird feeders, crockery, fountains, statues and in some cases even water beads & artificial snow for decoration.

It is surprising the variety of products and ideas one can find in your local garden centre that you will not find in main stream retail. Makes Christmas shopping easy.