

Look no further for gardening gifts

BY JOEL M. LERNER

As the holidays draw near, it's time to start thinking about gifts for the gardeners in your life. Among the many possibilities worth considering are gloves, tools, planters, pest repellents, organic growing media and, of course, plants. To help get you started, here is a list of some products that we reviewed over the past several months and would gladly recommend.

Gloves: West County's Work and Landscape gloves, which are made with a fabric woven from recycled plastic bottles, win my vote for ingenuity. Each pair removes the equivalent of one 8-ounce water bottle from landfills, and their use of yarn from recycled materials results in a 75 percent energy savings over new materials. But the gloves aren't just environmentally friendly. The fabric is softer and more flexible than polyester spandex, and the protection is better than most other synthetic gloves I've used. Cost: \$20 to \$28. To find these gloves, call 1-800-475-0567 or go to www.westcountygardener.com.

Tools: Union Jack Stable & Garden offers a pitchfork made from polypropylene that is more practical for most garden tasks than the typical steel version. Manufactured by Harold Moore Ltd. in Great Britain, this tool won't rust or rot, and it is safe — it will bounce back if run over with a truck but won't puncture tires. It has become one of my staples for carrying weeds and brush — especially thorny materials — to the compost bin, and it's perfect for turning compost, scooping debris, mulch and woodchips. You can also use it to level tilled gardens and make rows for planting seeds in spring. At a relatively light four pounds, it doesn't add extra weight to a load. Cost: \$54.95. For more information, call 1-800-672-8119 or go to www.unionjackstable.com.

Planters: Lechuza's planters offer an innovative spin on water conservation by including a reservoir in the base of the container. These shatterproof planters can be used indoors or out, are frost-proof, and come in a variety of sizes. The larger models feature a drainage plug. We had great success this summer growing culinary thyme outdoors in a self-watering windowsill planter. Now it can come inside for the winter. Keep in mind that you must water and fertilize plants as you would any others for 12 weeks before the plant begins using the reservoir on its own. Then, plantings will take care of themselves; you only need to add water or water-soluble nutrients when the water level falls to the minimum level. The planters start at \$29.95. For more information, call 1-877-532-4892 or go to www.lechuza.com.

Another planter to consider is a raised bed, which offers easy access to plants. The ingenious raised beds made by Naturalyards can be assembled in about 10 minutes on any level surface, be it a patio, a driveway or a backyard. The finished Lawson false-cypress lumber comes ready to assemble, requires no adjustments before use, and is rot- and pest-resistant. We built one earlier this year and found that the pieces fit together perfectly. The planter depth is built up vertical-

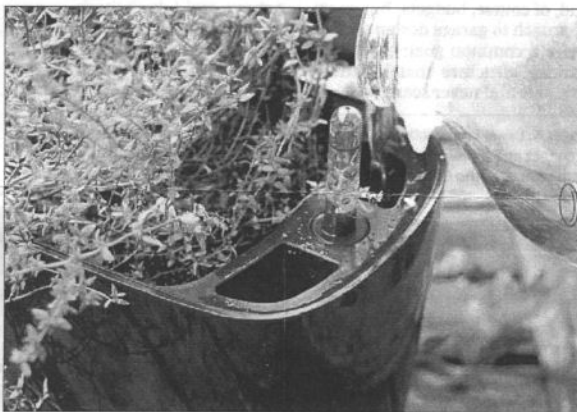


SANDRA LEAVITT LERNER / FTWP

These Bonnie Plant tomatoes are growing in a Naturalyard raised bed that makes them easier to tend.



Bonnie Plants has developed a fully biodegradable peat pot.



The Lechuza planter takes care of itself while you're away.



The Union Jack Stable & Garden polypropylene pitchfork.

ing for as much as 33 inches in depth. We chose an arrangement that would provide us with a planter that was four feet wide by eight feet long by 16.5 inches deep. This was ample space to accommodate our vegetable garden, which we were able to cultivate in full sun in our driveway.

product materials. No peat bogs have been disturbed to make this material and no nutrients that can pollute rivers and streams have been added. We used a completely organic blend containing coconut husk fiber, forest products, parboiled rice hulls and pure worm casings. The Organic Mechanics Soil Company recommends adding compost, manure or leaf mold to this product. I also recommend using ocean-based nutrients, such as kelp, seaweed, and fishmeal applied with every other watering. For more information, call 1-610-692-7404 or go to www.organicmechanicsoil.com.

Bonnie Plants has taken biodegradable peat pots to another level by developing four- and five-inch models that biodegrade when planted. This new container has provided ease of planting for vegetables and herbs without creating extra plastic to recycle or throw away. The only throwaway part is the cellophane rim holding the pots together. These pots biodegrade well for addressing the scourge of plastic containers. The bottom of the pot is scored to tear off and add to your planting medium. I would like to see the emergence of Bonnie Plants biodegradable pots in perennials and woody plant nursery containers. For more information, go to www.bonnieplants.com.

Plants: Ball Horticultural Company asked us to test several new annuals, including the Zahara zinnia yellow, disease-tolerant, heat-loving and drought tolerant in full sun. We squeezed them into about five hours of sunlight and they are still producing blooms. Mint mocha coleus was also an eye-catcher with lacy, colorful foliage and deeply lobed leaves, grown in partial shade. We tried it with Henna coleus outstanding with serrated burgundy-backed chartreuse leaves. They grew to their premiere 18 to 24 inches and thrived in moist, well-drained soil. Check local garden centers in spring for availability. For more information, go to www.ballhort.com.

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formation, call 1-541-488-0838 or go to www.naturalyards.com.

Pest repellents: We prefer repellents that are fully biodegradable, safe for the environment but still effective at fending off troublemakers. Deer Stopper by Messina Wildlife works for up to a month, even in rain. It exudes a pleasant aroma — made of rosemary oil, mint oil and putrescent whole egg solids and it's approved for organic gardening. It can be found at garden, hardware, home improvement and natural food grocery stores. For more information, go to www.messinawildlife.com.

Growth Media: Organic Mechanics Container Blend Potting Soil was developed as a growth medium that uses only organic,

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