

Holiday Gifts

By: Taun Beddes , USU Assistant Professor

As we approach the holiday season, gifts are on our minds. For gardeners, many useful and thoughtful items will bring joy and happiness. I'm a practical person, and so some of the best gifts for me are things that make my life easier. One of my favorites includes Japanese gardening knives, sometimes called hori-hori knives. They look somewhat like a traditional gardening trowel but have a straight blade 1 ½ inches wide and 7 inches long. Often, one edge is serrated, allowing for cutting. They are extremely useful for planting bulbs, annuals, and perennials, weeding in the lawn, vegetable garden, and flowerbeds, cutting open bags of compost and mulch, and even cutting sod. They usually sell for around \$20. I keep one in my work truck and another in my shed.

I do not have an automated sprinkling system, so I drag hoses to water my yard. One fabulous item is mechanical hose-end timers. I have installed four irrigation taps with a hose-end timer attached to each for the summer. I use them to water my lawn and drip irrigation in my vegetable garden. I can set a timer for whatever I need and not worry about turning off the water later. I frequently forget to do this, even if I set a timer on my phone. The hose-end timers allow me to run errands or even sleep at night, giving me peace of mind and allowing me to conserve water. I have found that mechanical timers often last longer and are more durable than battery-operated digital versions. The digital clocks frequently do not hold up to frequent use. All the mechanical timers I have tried are mostly or entirely plastic. I have tried at least 15 models over the years. They always break if left out over the winter to freeze or are jarred repeatedly by aggressively pulling on the hose to move it. In this situation, they break where the hose connects to them. However, they are very useful.

Easy-to-care-for house plants can also be an excellent gift for the right gardener. One of the easiest and most beautiful is the various types of holiday cacti. The different species include Thanksgiving cactus, Christmas Cactus, and Easter cactus. However, modern cultivars are hybrids of these and often bloom all winter. I've seen some that bloom year-round. Holiday cacti are long-lived. They can live over 75 years in ideal conditions.

Other easy-to-care-for house plants include pathos, spider plants, heart-leaf philodendrons, cast iron plants, and sansevieria. Sansevieria is sometimes known as mother-in-law's tongue or snake plant. All of these tolerate lower light levels, which are common in homes. Cast iron plants also tolerate cooler temperatures, and they are happy in unheated rooms that do not freeze if they get sufficient light.