

Ask an Expert: Pruners Make a Great Gift for Gardeners

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If you are looking for a useful gift for the gardeners on your shopping list, consider hand pruners or loppers. Hand pruners are similar to scissors, but are sturdier and are used to cut branches less than 1/2-inch thick. Loppers have much longer handles and cut limbs up to 2-inches wide. There are many options available, depending on specific needs and how frequently they will be used. But be aware, as with most things, you get what you pay for. Hand shears and loppers can cost as little as \$5 and more than \$200, depending on features and durability. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Unless pruners or loppers are used infrequently, avoid the least expensive models including anything under \$10 for hand pruners and under \$20 for loppers. In addition to being of lesser quality, less expensive models can also cause chronic hand, arm and shoulder pain with frequent, repeated use. There is also increased risk of injury such as crushed fingers, smashed knuckles and skin cuts due to needing to use excessive force to make a cut. Low-end models are also more likely to cause unnecessary plant damage by crushing and shredding cut stems and branches.
- Two styles of cutting devices are available — anvil and bypass. Anvil styles have blades that squeeze a branch and as they cut, the blades impact on a flat surface (the anvil portion). Bypass types cut with a sharp blade passing an unsharpened edge similar to the way scissors cut. Anvil styles must be kept sharp or they can cause excessive limb damage. Bypass pruners are generally recommended over anvil.

- Some companies offer geared or ratcheted models that help increase hand force to make cuts easier, which can be useful for those who lack hand strength. But be aware that especially on lower end models, this feature adds additional segments that may break on the pruner.
- Purchasing quality hobbyist and professional-grade models has several advantages. Many come with a cushioning system that minimizes the impact on hands and arms, prevents hitting knuckles together and minimizes wear and tear on joints and rotator cuffs. Upper-end models often have replaceable parts. They are generally made of higher quality metals that are more resistant to breaking and bending. Expect to pay \$50 or more. A few locally available brands include Stihl, Bahco, Felco, Florian, Hickok and Corona. Corona makes both hobbyist and professional-grade options, and most of their products are of high-enough quality for moderate homeowner use. They are sometimes more expensive but may be of better quality.
- Before purchasing, open and close hand pruners and loppers a few times with the same force needed to make an actual cut to get an idea of sturdiness, comfort and ease of use.

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