

Best gifts for gardeners

When it comes to gifts for gardeners, the options tend to fall into two groups: deluxe items that bemused non-gardeners buy in desperation for their green-fingered friends, and the functional guilty pleasures that gardeners buy for themselves. Despite their luxurious materials and designer credentials, objects in the deluxe group are frequently rewrapped and regifted. Those that make it as far as the garden tend not to win many prizes in the luxury gift stakes, but normally end up being the most used and the best loved. Here are six of the horticultural best

Get to grips with those garden chores

For some gardeners, getting your hands dirty is all part of the fun, but for those who want that dream plot without the dirty nails, scratches and ground-in grime, these ergonomic gloves might just be the answer.

Designed by a leading orthopaedic hand specialist, bionic gloves respond to the anatomy of the hand and its movements, forming a comfortable «second skin» that helps prevent blisters, callouses and fatigue. Made from goatskin and designed for heavy-duty work, Tough Pro Gloves have silicone reinforcements and anatomical pads designed to absorb vibration from mowers, trimmers and other power tools.

The Women's Classic Gardening Glove has silicon fingertips for increased durability and protection, and webbed zones between the fingers to help hands breathe. Extra padding on the palm provides durability, and a neoprene cuff prevents debris from entering the glove. Now all you need is a bionic back and bionic knees.

Tough Pro Glove or Women's Classic Gardening Glove, £19.99 (Dh115), www.bionic-glove.co.uk

Never leave home without them

For when you absolutely have to prune every last bush on the plot, accept no substitute. Like the Swiss Army knife, Rolex, Gruyere cheese, and Roger Federer, Felco secateurs are one of Switzerland's greatest exports.

Made by a family firm in a former watch factory since 1945, Felco secateurs are subject to the kind of exacting standards normally associated with luxury timepieces. Their forged aluminium handles even come with a lifetime guarantee.

Every Felco component can be repaired or replaced, and the company website even offers online tutorials on how to clean, sharpen and dismantle their secateurs.

Professional gardeners usually opt for the Felco 12, which comes complete with a revolving handle that reduces the overall cutting effort required by 30 per cent as well as the risk of developing repetitive strain injury. Felco secateurs are to serious gardeners what the American Express card was to Alan Whicker and Karl Malden: they never leave home without them.

Felco Model 12 Compact Deluxe Secateurs, £49.95 (Dh290), www.felco.com. Also available from Amazon and Garden4less, or contact Agricultural Materials Co Ltd, Al Ain, for local suppliers: 03 764 1064, amc.emirates@agrimatco-me.com

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Time for tea?

Is this a gift for the committed recycler, or a gift for the recycler who deserves to be committed? The jury is still out, but the (mostly sane) Bokashi users I know swear by them.

The Bokashi system uses a recycled plastic bucket, thin layers of bran infused with effective microorganisms and anaerobic fermentation to pickle unwanted kitchen waste, including things such as bone, dairy products and meat that couldn't normally be recycled on traditional garden compost heaps.

Bokashi bins act as compost accelerators, taking only two weeks to produce a fermented material that can either be added to your outdoor compost bin or buried straight into your garden soil.

After another four to six weeks this pickled Bokashi waste will supply your plants with nourishing food while conditioning and enlivening your soil with healthy microbes. Bokashi bins also produce «Bokashi tea», which can be diluted and used to feed your plants, or even used neat for unblocking drains.

A small sized Bokashi bin and a one kilogram bag of Bokashi bran cost Dh360 and are available from Bokashi Dubai. Visit www.bokashidubai.com for details

Smarter irrigation

If gardening in the UAE is about one thing, it's irrigation. And what better way to inject some much-needed style into that most essential of tasks than by using one of Gardena's candy-striped grey and orange hoses?

Gardena's products all come with a year's warranty, and the hoses and dispensers come in a variety of models to suit gardens of all sizes. Ace Hardware currently has an offer on Gardena's new

Smart Buggy that includes a 20 metre, 13 millimetre Skintech hose and full set of connectors that are perfect for keeping watering times tidy on a medium-sized plot.

For smaller gardens where space is at a premium, there are wall-mounted dispensers that keep your hose out from under your feet, while for the largest plots there is a majestic, all-steel reel designed specifically for long 60 to 100 metre hoses.

Gardena Smart Buggy, hose and connectors Dh429; Gardena roll-up, wall-mounted dispenser and 10m hose (Dh549); Gardena large steel reel (Dh949). Contact Ace Hardware for details, 02 673 1665 or www.aceuae.com

For when it's too dark or hot to venture outside

Gardeners love nothing more than the opportunity to poke their noses into somebody else's plot and this DVD gives them the opportunity to feed that obsession. The series follows the BBC's Monty Don, a gardener, writer and broadcaster, as he travels across the globe on 10 journeys, visiting 80 of the world's most celebrated, spectacular and inspiring gardens and landscapes.

Although the series isn't new, there is something here for everyone. Many of the chosen sites will come as a surprise to even the most knowledgeable gardener. As well as obligatory visits to such famous and publicly accessible gardens as at the Alhambra and Generalife in Cordoba, Taj Mahal and Kirstenbosch National Botanical Gardens in Cape Town, Don also ventures into private and inaccessible gardens that most of us could simply never hope to visit. The DVD is well worth repeated viewing.

Around the World in 80 Gardens, complete BBC series, £8.58 (Dh50), www.amazon.co.uk

http://www.thenational.ae/lifestyle/house-home/best-gifts-for-gardeners

Best gifts for gardeners

Join the most exclusive gardening club in the world

As a gardener in the UAE, it's often difficult to stay abreast of developments in the wider horticultural world, even with the internet. But a subscription to Hortus, a quarterly journal devoted to the finest, most intelligent horticultural writing in the English language, will solve this.

A one-year, rest-of-the-world subscription is £49 (Dh280). Visit www.hortus.co.uk for details.

Ask Nick

I often look at the labels on houseplants to find out whether a plant is suitable for my living room but all they say is that the plant needs good, medium or low light. That's all very well, but how do I tell what kind of light I have in my home?

If you're a keen photographer, you can use a light meter to evaluate the intensity of the available light in your home. Otherwise, you can gain a rough idea by placing a sheet of white paper on the spot where the plant will sit and then holding your hand about 30 centimetres above it. If a clearly defined shadow results, the location receives bright light. If a muted but clearly definable shadow results, the light is medium. If your hand shadow is barely visible, the amount of light is low. Buy your houseplants accordingly.