

Gift Ideas

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Ask a Master Gardener

Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts



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Holiday Gift Ideas for the Gardener

Books fill the winter with ideas and inspiration

By Kari Ranten, Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener

It's a windy rainy day. The blooms have faded. The vegetable garden is put to bed. A layer of mulch graces the landscape. Bulbs are in the ground. For many gardeners, late fall and winter are quiet months as they await the Spring emergence of new textures and colors in the garden.

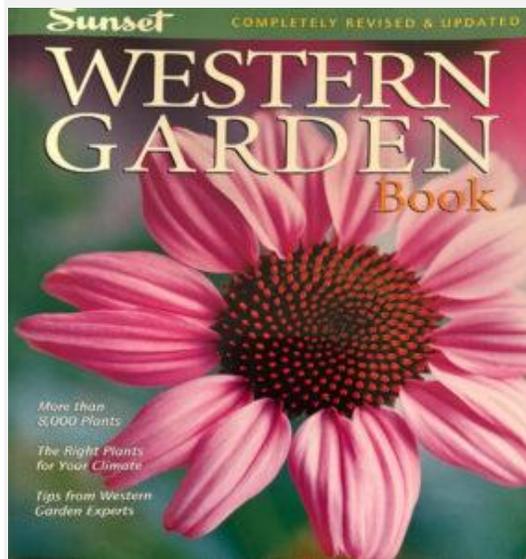
The holidays provide an opportunity to lift your favorite gardener's spirits with the gift of a gardening book – or two. Filled with beautiful images and educational content, there is a wide variety of volumes to help gardeners learn something new and provide inspiration for the seasons to come.

Gardeners are fortunate to have an abundance of great titles on the market, including some new volumes, some old favorites, and many offerings that zero in on the unique climate and conditions of the Pacific Northwest.

For the gardener with a passion for a specific plant family, publications are available singularly focused on individual species, from pansies to succulents or dahlias to peonies. Still more provide guides beyond the plants to include insects, pollinators, birds, animals, and other creatures important to the northwest ecosystem.

To get started, here are a few ideas to begin a search for the perfect holiday gift for a gardener near you. Check out your favorite retailer for more titles and information.

Books by a local author: Erin Benzakein, founder of Floret Farms in Skagit Valley, has written and co-authored several books about growing and displaying flowers. Benzakein’s most recent book, *Floret Farm's Discovering Dahlias: A Guide to Growing and Arranging Magnificent Blooms* was released in 2021 and co-authored by Julie Chai, Jill Jorgensen, and photographer Chris Benzakein. The book offers inspiration and tips for growing, harvesting, and arranging the popular summer blooms.



A classic: *The New Sunset Western Garden Book: The Ultimate Gardening Guide* (2012, 9th edition) is a staple for beginning and experienced gardeners, offering details and tips for selecting, planting, and caring for a wide range of perennials, annuals, shrubs, and trees specific to each climate zone. Photos and drawings create strong visuals to support the how-to guide and “Western Plant Encyclopedia” with listings for more than 8,000 plants.

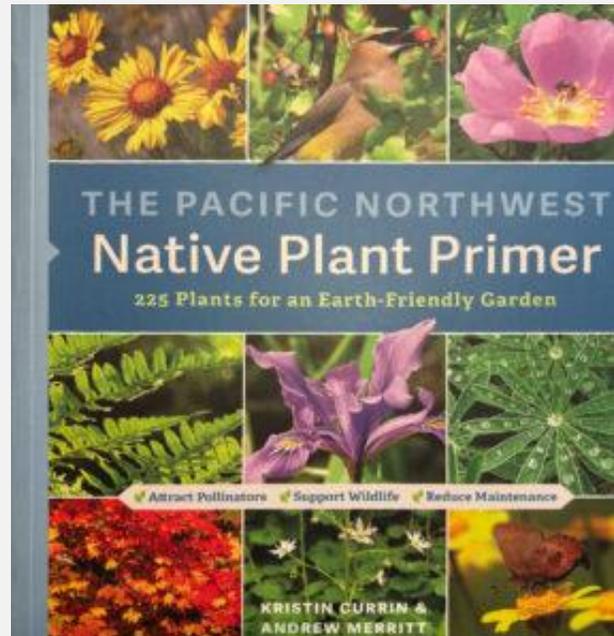
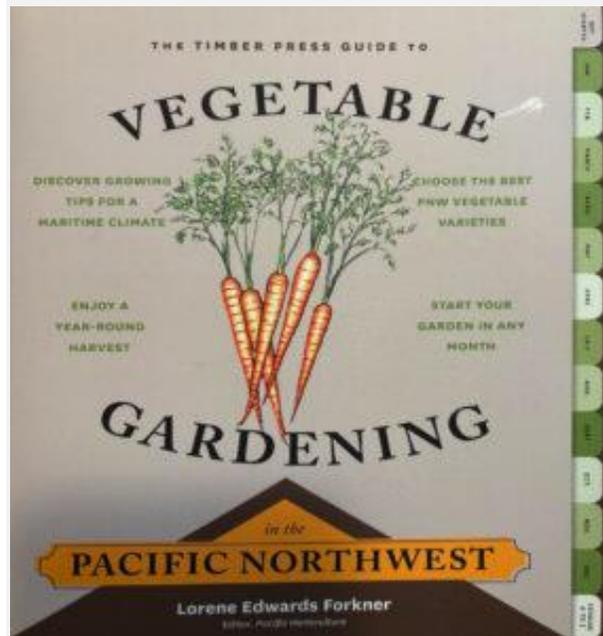
For the weather watcher, and more: For gardeners and many more who are interested in predictions for the year, calendars, and astronomical data, a copy of *the 2025 Old Farmer’s Almanac* is a great addition to the bookshelf. The almanac provides a handy look at the anticipated forecast

for the upcoming seasons by region, along with trends and stories about gardening, nature, cooking, and more across the United States.

For the vegetable gardener: Winter is an important time for vegetable gardening enthusiasts to plan for the next season, order seeds, and potentially start plants in a greenhouse or other indoor propagation setup. *The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Pacific Northwest* (2013) by Lorene Edwards Forkner is specifically directed at those growing food crops in Washington, Oregon, Southeastern Alaska, and British Columbia. The book features a month-by-month outline of activities to help plan, prepare, plant, grow, and harvest the next vegetable garden.

For berry and fruit tree enthusiasts: *Growing Berries and Fruit Trees in the Pacific Northwest: How to Grow Abundant, Organic Fruit in Your Backyard* (2019) by Tara Austen

Weaver stays true to the title, providing details on successfully growing more than 75 cultivars of fruit trees and berries east and west of the Cascades.

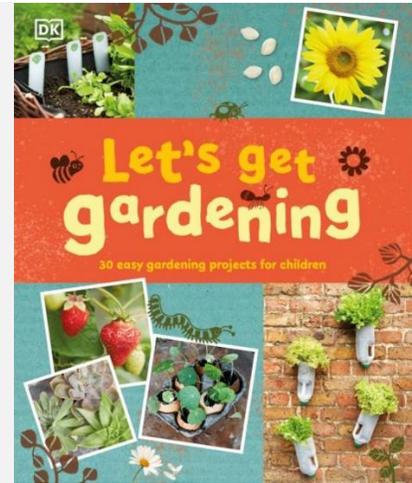
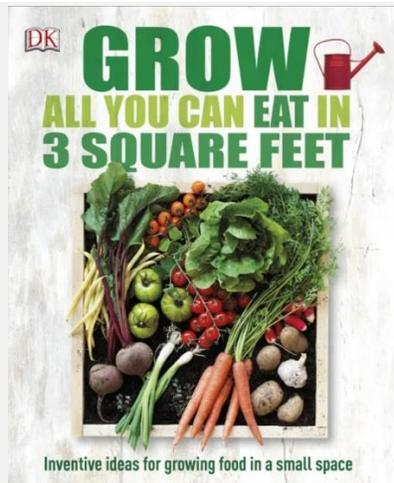
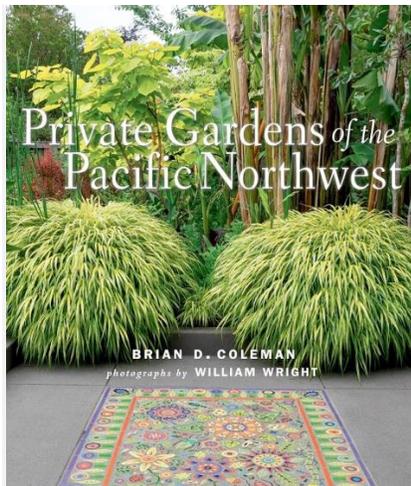


Left: *The Timber Press Guide to Vegetable Gardening in the Pacific Northwest* (2013) by Lorene Edwards Forkner. **Right:** *The Pacific Northwest Native Plant Primer: 225 Plants for an Earth-Friendly Garden* by Kristin Currin and Andrew Merritt.

For those interested in native plants: *The Pacific Northwest Native Plant Primer: 225 Plants for an Earth-Friendly Garden* by Kristin Currin and Andrew Merritt was published in 2023. Supported by many photographs and examples, the book offers details on how to successfully grow native plants in this region that features a range of geography, weather, and soils, along with tips to support pollinators, wildlife, and other creatures.

To learn more about supporting beneficial insects and other creatures in the garden: *Garden Allies: The Insects, Birds & Other Animals That Keep Your Garden Beautiful and Thriving* (2021) provides insights on how to support and protect populations of spiders, ladybugs, pollinators, and other creatures in the garden. Written by Frédérique Lavoipierre, who was director of education at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, the book features pen-and-ink drawings by Craig Latker.

For the perennial lover: Abundant color photography by Jacqueline Koch complements the content of *Perennials for the Pacific Northwest: 500 Best Plants for Flower Gardens* (2013) by Marty Wingate. The book details how to buy and grow the many perennials available in the Northwest and offers ideas on designing your garden, ranging from formal to informal.



Left: *Private Gardens of the Pacific Northwest* (2021) by Brian Coleman. **Center:** DK’s *Grow All you Can Eat in 3 Square Feet: Inventive Ideas for Growing Food in a Small Space* (2015). **Right:** DK’s *Let's Get Gardening* (2020).

A coffee table option: *Private Gardens of the Pacific Northwest* (2021) by Brian Coleman shares detailed descriptions and extensive photography by William Wright to provide a glimpse of 20 private estate and residential gardens that showcase the abundance and artistic potential of the northwest landscape.

For the gardener with limited space: DK’s *Grow All you Can Eat in 3 Square Feet: Inventive Ideas for Growing Food in a Small Space* (2015) is “packed with information on window boxes, potted plants, patio gardening, raised beds, small square-foot gardening, container gardening, and everything else related to growing your own small garden,” according to the online introduction. Presented in short, illustrated segments, the content is helpful for the new and experienced gardener with limited deck, patio, or garden space.

For the littlest ones: Check out *Hello, World! Garden Time: A Book of Plants and Gardening for Kids* (2022) by Jill McDonald. This board book for ages up to age 2 is part of the *Hello, World* series of 32 titles. It’s colorful and provides a great introduction to how plants grow and the role of gardening in providing food.

For children ages 5 to 8: Another volume from DK titled *Let's Get Gardening* (2020) details 30 gardening projects to work on with young children. The projects include how to grow vegetables, create a ladybug sanctuary, and attract pollinators. Step-by-step instructions and colorful photos make the projects easy to understand and put into action. The book also explores concepts around recycling, sustainability, and environmental awareness.

This is just a sampling of the many titles that await in bookstores and online to engage the gardener in your life regardless of their age and interests. There is, literally, something for every gardener to get them through the quiet of winter and inspired for the possibilities of future seasons. Nothing like curling up with a good book.



Kari Ranten

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kari Ranten is a retired journalist and health care communicator who became a certified Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener in 2024.