

## A Christmas gift for Dear Aunt Tillie!

Jim Lewis\*

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Oh Lordy! I haven't gotten a Christmas gift for Dear Aunt Tillie!

What shall I do?

Wait! She gardens. Ah-ha!

If you've forgotten someone like Aunt Tillie and she is a gardener, don't despair. Our larger local nurseries and garden centers can save the day. Of course, you wouldn't dare give Aunt Tillie a plant; who knows what she likes or needs? Luckily, though, most gardeners like tools, gadgets, and gizmos, and few hobbies are as well stocked with these than gardening.

In fact, even a brief stroll through the shops at our well-stocked nurseries will overwhelm you with ideas for Aunt Tillie's Christmas stocking.



Before you even step in the door of the nursery shop, there are all those terra cotta pots. I can't imagine a gardener who would not be happy with a few orange pots of various sizes and shapes (\$3 to \$20). And nearby are the fancier (well, all right, gaudier) Mexican painted pots. Something must look good in those.

But it's inside the stores that your job as a would-be Santa for Aunt Tillie gets difficult. Such choices! From books to "large print" thermometers that can hang out in the garden but be read from the comfort of your home (\$25), treasures abound.

Be careful with books. Aunt Tillie might already have the very necessary Southern Living Garden Book (\$20). But maybe she doesn't have the even-more-valuable Southern Living Garden Problem Solver (\$25). My current favorite among garden books is Perennials for Every Purpose (Rodale, \$20 paperback).

Here are a few more ideas: Garden gloves. They wear out, or we lose (one of) them, so every gardener is happy to get a new pair (\$8 - \$15). Hand tools -- trowels, hand rakes, weeders (\$15).

Decorative stepping stones -- we all need to walk mud free around our gardens (\$7-\$20). Wind chimes (\$10 - \$50 or more) to make you smile after a long day.

I can't imagine that if Aunt Tillie is a gardener that she isn't a birder, too. So add birdbaths, bird feeders, or bird houses (\$20-\$60 and up).

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And don't forget seeds. From flowers to veggies (\$1 - \$3 per packet). No one minds getting a few extra seeds of something we already have, either. Closely related to seeds -- in a marketing sense, at least -- are bulbs, from amaryllis to tulips (4 - \$15).

So, for Aunt Tillie or any other overlooked gardening friend or relative, last-minute shopping for the ideal gift is as easy as a drive to your neighborhood nursery. And if there's just so much to choose from that you can't make up your mind, or if you simply have no idea what Aunt Tillie might want -- or better yet, need -- there's always the gift certificate.

Pass the buck. Let her choose.

*\*Jim Lewis is a Master Gardener volunteer with the University of Florida IFAS Extension in Leon County. Photos compliments of FlorianTools.com: garden gloves, garden tool rack.*

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