

## A Living Gift for Your Father



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension:

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**A** really nice gift for your father this Father's Day would be a very special plant which would remind him of your thoughtfulness each time he visits his garden. There are so many plants to choose from that I consulted with a few people at several of our local nurseries and garden centers for suggestions and to make sure that the plants selected would be available to you when you went shopping for them.

I came up with twelve plants that made it on at least two of the individual lists. Each of these has some unique feature which should interest your gardening Dad. Included in the list are flowering shrubs, citrus trees, native plants, a native tree, an ornamental tree and some hanging baskets. So you should find something you like.

Two plants made it to the top of every list, the Knock Out rose and the hydrangea. Both will make excellent gifts. One likes full sun, the other partial shade.

The Knock Out rose is a recent introduction and has become a big hit. It is a compact bushy shrub growing to about 3 feet tall by 3 feet wide. It is claimed to be very tolerant to the dreaded black spot disease. It bears clusters of 2-3 inch cherry-red blossoms from spring through frost. An article in the May 19<sup>th</sup> issue of the Democrat gave it quite a boost. It is in full bloom now so it will make a nice gift.

The hydrangea is a southern favorite and is also in bloom now. It comes in several varieties and a range of color from deep pink to deep blue, including white. While it likes the morning sun, it does not tolerate our afternoon burners. So it must be planted where it gets plenty of afternoon shade. This plant is almost a must in every southern garden.

If you really want to give a very fine gift consider the Japanese maple. This special small tree made everyone's list. These graceful red leafed beauties make excellent accent plantings. They tend to be pricey but, isn't Dad worth it?

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If Dad likes native plants, there are several recommended. Native azaleas are always a good choice. They come in many varieties and some are even fragrant. The one in my yard has bright orange spidery blossoms with an intense spicy aroma... These plants like semi-shade. A tree native to our area alone is the Ash Magnolia. It is characterized by its huge leaves and giant white flowers. A real specimen plant for a wooded area, conservationists have encouraged the planting of this rarity for its preservation. Maybe Dad would be interested? Virginia Sweet Spires is another interesting native for a shade garden. Finally, there are several ferns available; my favorite for the shade garden is the Wood Fern.

Another plant that got almost unanimous recommendation was Agapanthus, aka African lily or Lily of the Nile. The clusters of blue or white blossoms are borne atop tall stems from early summer through late fall. This plant needs a sunny, well drained location. It makes a great border plant.

Two small citrus trees made the list, a Myer lemon and a hybrid called Limequat, which from the name implies a cross between a lime and a kumquat. If Dad tends to the unusual, perhaps he would like to take a chance on one of these. With their glossy green leaves and bright yellow fruit they do make attractive trees. They are very cold tolerant and do bear fruit in this area. One suggestion was to plant one near the patio where it would be handy at cocktail hour.

If you think Dad would like a hanging basket there were two suggested.

The first is a tropical favorite, Bougainvillea. This almost neon bright fuchsia red vine will give a vivid splash of color to any patio or yard. It does need lots of sun but not too much water, in fact it likes to be a little on the dry side. So unless it is out in the full sun all day long it doesn't need water more than three times a week. The second is a petunia called Supertunia. This is an amazing plant that I was introduced to last year. It hung from my pool house all summer long and suffered from some serious neglect. At times it looked like it was a goner, but a shot of water and just like a resurrection fern it came right back. It is supposed to be an annual but this spring to my surprise it is still alive and blooming.

There you have it, a list of a dozen plants, each unique, all popular even if for different reasons. So we hope we have given you something to choose from, and as promised you can be assured that at least one of the garden centers in this area will have the plant you selected. If, however, these do not satisfy you I am sure that someone just as friendly and knowledgeable as the people I consulted with will be available at your favorite garden center and will be more than happy to assist you in finding just the right plant for dear old Dad.

Good hunting.

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