

All I want for Christmas is a WW1 trenching tool



My hobbies are gardening, baking and cats so you can bet your bottom dollar that my Christmas presents will be of a horticultural, culinary or feline nature. Well its almost that time again folks, so I thought I would offer some practical advice on choosing really useful and prized gardening gifts that will put the recipient in mind of the donor every time they are pressed into operation.

It's likely that you have your faithful well-worn implements but just as likely that they have seen better days, so good quality replacements would be very welcome. Over the years you may well have bought, inherited or

gratefully received a myriad of tools, the majority now suspended purposefully on your shed wall, while I'm guessing you only ever use about half a dozen. So which are your Must Have tools? Once I identified mine I donated the other tools to schools or charities, and doubled up on my essentials. If you've ever watched Monty Don messing around in his potting shed, no doubt you will have noted the dozen or so Felco secateurs lined up on the wall behind him.

My everyday equipment includes, in order of usage: surgical gloves, soil care gloves, sizes 6 & 8 Felco secateurs, (no, I haven't got shares in Felco!) light weight trimming snips, extendable loppers, garden shears, hand fork, grubber and last but not least my WW1 trenching tool.



Believe it or not this speaks volumes about the tasks I perform and the environment I work in. Surgical gloves under gardening gloves preserve my nails, and as an all season gardener, keep my hands warm and dry. My primary activity is pruning shrubs and perennials. I don't go up ladders so the shrubs I prune are no higher than my extendable loppers. A hand fork cuts through clay soil far better than a trowel and a grubber loosens compacted soil surfaces. Incidentally, did you know that the bar joining the handle to the prongs – aka tines – of a hand fork, is called a Tang? Anyway the tang and the tines need to be very securely welded together as this is the weak spot that usually snaps or bends in cheap tools. Tines should be stainless steel and the handle hardwood. Not that I'm hinting by any means! But my WW1 trenching tool is a life saver; the pick is ideal for breaking through baked soil and yanking out thatched roots, whilst the three inch mattock blade severs thick roots and prizes out extensive root balls. Got it on eBay of course!

Don't know about you, I'm always losing my tools. An ideal gift would be a holster that I

could keep my secateurs in without stabbing my leg or tearing the pockets of my trousers with their blades. The best tool carrier? A Japanese saw bag.

Here are some other slightly more decorative suggestions: A good set of support loops, hoops or stakes. I find that even though I have dozens of semi-circular hoops and loop stakes, none of them are tall or broad enough, a definite case of plant growth underestimation! There is an increasingly imaginative but practical selection out there at plant fairs and garden centres.



Bird feeder plant stakes, that's another Must Have (although the risk of bird seed germination might put some people off.) Or even bird feeders (squirrel proof); lovely way to while away the time, watching the birdies.

Oh how I would love to waft about in floral eau de nil and pink dungarees, carrying a wicker basket full of paisley hand tools. I went through a phase of requesting jaunty or humorous kneeling pads until I got sick of dragging them around with me. The next best thing appeared to be pastel coloured kneepads, the sort you attach around the back of your knees with Velcro straps. Torture! After about half an hour it felt like you were wearing a set of

piranha jaws. Best gift of all? Three pairs of heavy-duty cargo style trousers with built in kneepads and holster multi-pockets; one on, one in the wash, one in the drawer!

And finally, floral tool gift sets are very thoughtful but if they are pressed into service in clay soil they won't make it to Easter; a good gift however for junior garden novices. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to the garden centre to spend my National Garden Gift Vouchers!

CAROLINE BROOME



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Prize-winning Suburb gardeners

As the cheerful strains of Harrow's Grimsdyke Brass band rang out in the garden of the Free Church Hall in Hampstead Garden Suburb, visitors inside were enjoying the sights and scents of HGS Horticultural Society's Autumn Flower Show on 8 September.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the summer's hot weather and later torrential rain, exhibitors produced a stunning array of flowers, fruit, veg and cooked and baked goodies from their gardens and allotments. There was also a photo competition and a constant flow of customers met friends and family in the small hall for home-made teas.

The Horticultural Society has good reason to be cheerful, as six of its members have just won awards for beautiful gardens in a competition run by the

London Gardens Society in its annual garden competition, which covers the whole of Greater London.

At the presentation ceremony held at the Guildhall on 4 October, the society was very proud to hear that committee members had walked away with the two major prizes. Diane Berger and Suburb News correspondent Caroline Broome and husband David came first and won cups and certificates in the 'large back garden' and 'small back garden' competition categories respectively – for the third year running! Horticultural Society member Rosie Daniels was runner-up in the 'Best Patio Display', and she along with Marjorie Harris and Yvonne Oliver won gold certificates for their gardens.

Many of the LGS prize-winners will be opening their

gardens next year on 7 July, when the Horticultural Society celebrates its 110th year and opens 12 gardens on the same day in the Suburb in aid of the National Garden Scheme (yellow book) charities. There will be full details on the Hort. Soc. website – www.hortsoc.co.uk – in Suburb News, in the yellow

book and on the NGS website – www.ngs.org.uk – and on posters nearer the time. There will be two fabulous professional nurseries in attendance and teas in Fellowship House. Check the Horticultural Society website for details of all the special events in their 110th year.

MARJORIE HARRIS



(Left) LGS prizewinners, David and (our own) Caroline Broome; (top) Caroline (again) with Rosie Daniels and Diane Berger, also prizewinners; and (above) Hort Soc Flower Show winners Chris Page and Ruth Beedle with their prize winning fruit and vegetables

Suburb rainfall

The June comment on rainfall concluded that we were in a dry heatwave and were hoping for rain. Not nearly enough has come since then. Even in August when we did hear some thunder, it was some way away and we didn't get a real downpour.

With climate change on many people's minds, it is interesting to look at some comparisons. It seems reasonable to take May to September as the overall summer months. Using this period, 2018

was very dry (7.4 inches compared with a norm of 11.6 inches) but not the driest over the last thirty years (the normal time for averages to be calculated). 1989, with 5.8 inches, 1990, 2003 and 2016 were all lower than 2018. So, with rainfall in the Suburb, as with weather in Britain generally, climate change is bringing larger variations from normal rather than a steady drift towards more or less rain.

DIANA IWI FROM MEADWAY

Allotment Harvest Supper

The Allotment Committee had a wonderful Harvest Supper on October 6 at Fellowship House.

There was a terrific turn out of allotmenters and friends who all provided a sharing dish. The food was superb, mostly home-made and using allotment produce. The tables were decorated with hand-thrown flowerpots full of flowers and herbs, while the main food table was decorated

with an exquisite arrangement of figs in a glass cylinder.

Margaret Lancaster, the allotment committee secretary, announced the winner of the Phyllis Young Trophy, which was shared this year between Chris Page and Peter Hodgson.

For more information about Suburb allotments you can contact raallotments@hgs.org.uk.

RUTH BEEDLE



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