



HOLIDAY COUNTDOWN

WHAT TO BUY THE FAMILY GARDENER



▲ If we can put a man on the moon, why can't we find a **hose** that doesn't kink? That remains a dream, of course, but some perform better than others. Getting good marks (and a lifetime guarantee) is the **Craftsman black rubber hose** at **Sears**; \$35.99 for the 50-foot, and \$59.99 for the heavier 100-foot.



▲ A good memory isn't required for gardening. Sturdy markers eliminate the frustrating guesswork of having forgotten what's where. The **Paw Paw Everlast Label Co.** in Michigan makes 10 different kinds of long-lasting zinc markers and weather-proof peel-and-stick labels. (You can even have labels custom made.) A good bet is the 10½-inch-tall double-wire marker with a 2½-inch label area: **\$22 buys 30**. everlastlabel.com or 269-657-4921.



▲ **EarthBox Garden Kit with Growing System** is large enough to grow two tomato, cuke, or zucchini plants, lettuce, or flowers. It's on casters, so it can be rolled to sunny spots and is ideal for a deck or balcony. It's simple and almost foolproof, assuming you provide water and sun. In terra cotta or green, it can be used for years. It measures 29 inches long by 13½ inches wide by 11 inches high. **About \$44 at The Andersons and Meijer.**



▲ Some of the most dog-eared books on the shelf of Blade gardening columnist Kelly Heidbreder are **Best Garden Plants for Ohio** by **Debra Knapke and Alison Beck** (\$16.95); **Annuals for Michigan** by **Nancy Szerlag and Alison Beck** (\$18.95), and **Perennials for Michigan** by **Nancy Szerlag and Alison Beck** (\$19.95). Much of Michigan is in the same growing zone as northwest Ohio. The American Horticultural Society also has excellent titles such as **Great Plant Guide** (\$15.95) and **What Plant When** (\$14.95). **Barnes & Noble** has most of these on the shelf, and can obtain others within four days.



▲ A little birdie told us she needs drinking water when all else is frozen or parched. "**Bird bath de-icers**" is what she tweeted (in well under 140 characters): they're small heating elements that prevent water from stiffening up and range from a utilitarian element to a decorative plastic rock, **\$19 to \$44 at Titgemeier's Feed & Garden Store**, 701 Western Ave. 419-243-3731.



▲ If Bob Dylan had been a gardener, his 1966 song might have gone "Everybody must get stones." Get your loved one a rock, not for her finger but her flower bed. **Local granite field stone** shows traces of iron and sells for **9 cents a pound** at **Select Stone**. **Wisconsin granite field cobbles** don't have iron so they sport more vibrant color (**11 cents a pound**). **Gray feather rocks** are porous and lighter weight (**43 cents a pound**). And those beautiful **pearl mountain mica boulders** from Canada (pink with silvery glints, **25 cents a pound**) range from the size of a softball on up to 1,500 pounds. **Select Stone Co.** is at **9645 Airport Hwy., Springfield Township**. 419-861-9600.



▲ Most gardeners would love to know more about their **soil**, but have never gotten around to having it **tested**. Do it for them! This can be done now (as long as you can dig six to eight inches deep). One cup of soil from 10 to 15 spots in the garden, well mixed, is requested, and can be mailed in a zip-close bag in a small box or padded envelope. Amy Stone, educator at OSU Extension-Lucas County, recommends the **University of Massachusetts' quick and cheap (\$10) lab test**. Info at umass.edu/soiltest and 413-545-2311. (Ms. Stone, at 419-578-6783, can tell you more.)



▲ When to prune? Some say when the shears are sharp. Get your gardener a **sharpening stone** (**\$10-\$30 at many stores**). Or get pruners or loppers sharpened for less than **\$10 at Michigan Saw** (5559 W. Alexis Rd., Sylvania, 419-882-4097) and **Fred's Pro Hardware** (3333 Stickney Ave., 419-729-1961).

Lucky you. You have got a gardener in your life. They're easy to please without spending a fortune. From soft to hard, spiky to sharp, here are ideas they'll dig. (Note to family: This includes me!)

— By Tahree Lane
Blade Staff Writer

▲ A **folding pruning saw** makes quick work of branches and small trunks too thick for loppers. **Blades** range from 5 to 12 inches long, and prices from about **\$11 to \$30** at **Sears, Home Depot, Lowe's**, and other stores.



▲ **Gloves, gloves, gloves.** Real gardeners beat 'em up badly and need more than one pair each season. A couple of identical pairs (water resistant) let the gardener swap out the worn-out glove of the dominant hand come August. And if this gardener grows roses, get a long pair that reaches the elbows. **From \$5 up at The Andersons, Home Depot, Lowe's**, and other hardware stores.