



HOME+ GARDEN

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Holiday settings

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IN THE GARDEN

All I really want for Christmas...

Presents are one thing, but a beautiful garden is another matter entirely



Steve Whysall

What do I want for Christmas?
What do I really, really want? I have been doing a lot of hard thinking about this.

also love, love, love my Lowe's anvil-pruners.
I'm always losing trowels in the garden, so I always hope to find one or two new inexpensive ones under the tree Christmas morning.
I love my Garant Enviro-line shovel-spade and my red Corona rake and garden trugs (great when weeding or pruning or collecting leaf debris).
I love pot-toes (for lifting pots off the ground), my Planter's Buddy (trowel, knife, pruner, ruler and fork all in one), my Holey Soles "duck shoes" and my trusty Black and Decker vac-suck (for sucking up leaves and flower petals) and my ergonomic transplant spade with the round green handle.
All of these things would make any gardener happy. But I don't need any of them. In fact, I don't really need any new stuff at all.
What I am looking for this Christmas, what I think I need most, is some inspiration, a reason to believe that things work out for the good, that things are worth doing and

I guess all I really want for Christmas is a renewed feeling that we can succeed, rise above disappointment, banality and crassness, and that there is purpose for trying to create something beautiful in the world, such as a fabulous garden.
It's so easy these days to become cynical and jaded, especially when we are let down by people in positions of authority and responsibility. Look around and there are enough shades of this sadness. I have always found the garden to be a great source of comfort, encouragement and inspiration. It's where I see ugly things turn into beautiful things, and apparently dead things spring back to life and vitality.
It's a place where you can see first-hand the fierce will of nature to succeed: at the core of each plant is this amazing desire and compulsion to thrive and be productive.
You put a plant in the ground, watch over it, give it the most minimal of care and attention, and it out-performs your highest expectations and rewards you with fantastic flowers or delicious food. Breathtaking, really.

garden has always been a place where I can find a reason to feel encouraged and enthusiastic and look forward with hope and optimism.
It is one of the main reasons I like to visit beautiful gardens here and overseas.
Walking in a beautiful garden is a way of encountering the spirit of the person who originally conceived of and built the garden. When I walk in a carefully planned and cared-for garden, I am acutely aware of the will of the person who decided to create something beautiful.
This initial spark of creativity, this flash of imagination always permeates the entire garden and remains long after the person who dreamed up the project is gone.
I find the creative initiative to build something beautiful is often just as



Linda Poole, executive director of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, is among those special people who inspire Steve Whysall.



Burnaby gardener Bortolo Rinaldo pulls out tens of thousands of Christmas lights every year and majestically transforms his garden into a winter wonderland to raise money for a cancer charity. STUART DAVIES/VANCOUVER SUN FILES

FROM PAGE C9

All I really want for Christmas...

Presents are one thing, but a beautiful garden is another matter entirely

In my own garden, a lot of treasured plants died this year because I was away and not there to watch over them and make sure they were properly looked after.

It was discouraging, to say the least, to lose so many fine plants.

So the gift I would really like to give (and receive) this Christmas is a renewed sense that it is still always worthwhile having another go, keeping on striving to create something beautiful.

I notice other garden writers are feeling this need for inspiration, too.

Stephen Lacey, a garden writer for the Daily Telegraph whom I admire very much, said recently that all he wanted for Christmas (in his dreams, he added) was to "tour the wildflower-rich regions of the world — the Namaqualand desert, Colorado mountains, the Croatian meadows — to gather planting inspiration for the garden." I know exactly what he means. Lasting natural beauty always inspires us.

Continuity. Longevity. Faithful dedication. These are other wonderful qualities that I find inspiring when I find them in others. They are the opposite of flash-in-the-pan, here-today-gone-tomorrow, I-used-to-care-but-I-don't-anymore inconsistency.

Many people, it seems to me, only manage to do their best work after going through times of trial and disappointment. There is a virtue — and gardeners know it — in pushing on regardless of the disappointments.

There are local garden people who probably don't realize how much they inspire me.

I often draw on their example for their inspiration and for renewal.

There's Bortolo Rinaldo, for instance, a wonderful gardener



Alleynne and Barbara Cook are generous.

At the end of the season, does he put his feet up and take the long well-earned rest like the rest of us? Nope, he pulls out tens of thousands of Christmas lights and majestically transforms his garden into a winter wonderland to raise money for a cancer charity (Michael Cuccione Foundation for cancer research). Bortolo has been doing this every year since 1972 and even though he is now in his 70s, he still makes this enormous effort every Christmas. It is astonishing how much work it takes.

But most impressive is how he keeps on doing it and never gets discouraged.

Every year, I go by his house at 950 Kensington Ave. with my grandchildren to see the 50,000 lights, including a singing Santa, he has put up.

Every year, I can't resist tapping on Bortolo's front door to wish

I take a bottle of Prosecco. Such spontaneous kindness, so touching.

Linda Poole, executive director of the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, is another one who inspires me more than she knows with her unflagging enthusiasm and optimism for the event she started single-handedly back in 2006.

She has never stopped believing in her festival and the power it has to bring communities together and get people to pause for a moment to recognize the awesome beauty of nature all around them.

This Christmas, she is promoting an upgrade and reworked version of the festival's guide to cherry trees, written by Douglas Justice, associate director of the University of B.C. Botanical Garden.

The guide contains profiles of all the key cultivars of cherry trees,

this very useful little book, which I think makes a perfect stocking stuffer. It costs \$25 and is available from the garden shops at both VanDusen and the UBC garden.

Two other gardeners I have been greatly inspired by this year are Alleynne and Barbara Cook of North Vancouver.

Their generosity in giving away all their most treasured rhododendrons to the newly established Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden in Sechelt is very impressive.

I know how heart-wrenching it must have been, but at the same time how satisfying to know these beautiful things will continue on to give pleasure and inspire others.

Whatever gift you get this Christmas — trowel, spade or garden book — I hope you also get the precious gift of inspiration to lift you and keep



COURTESY OF LEE VALLEY TOOLS

Great gifts for gardeners are abundant during the holidays, such as tub trugs in various colours, gardening tools like the planter's buddy, right, or Garden Gloves by Watson.



GLENN BAGLO/VANCOUVER SUN FILES

WHERE TO BUY

Here's where you can get some of the garden items I mentioned:

- Ames True Temper-Import 682474 Planter's Buddy 7-In-1 Multi-Purpose Garden Tool. \$14.99 from Amazon.com
- Lowe's anvil pruners, \$48.88. Big Bear Tools at www.bigbeartools.com or Lee Valley Tools at www.leevalley.com
- Garden trugs. Available in three sizes from \$19.99 to \$29.99. GardenWorks stores.
- Pot Toes. Set of four costs

- Holey Soles PROline garden clogs. \$17.19 US from eBay at www.ebay.com or www.holeysoles.com
- Ergonomic green-round-handled transplanting spade. \$44.50. GardenWorks Loughheed Highway, Burnaby or Lee Valley Tools. www.leevalley.com

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