

Gifts to Grow and Gather in the Garden

In addition to the many riches of the summer harvest, gardens are a fabulous source of materials for homemade gifts. Using homegrown plants to make gifts sends a special message of caring to the recipient, and it's a way to make gift-giving more affordable. It's also fun! Plan ahead so there will be plenty of flowers, foliage, herbs, and other materials for culinary and crafting adventures.

Here are some ideas for your youth gardeners. These creations can also be used for fundraising and to inspire budding entrepreneurs!



Dried Flower Bouquets

Gather stems of dried flowers into simple bouquets, or use the flowers to adorn other items, such as grapevine wreaths. Easy-to-dry flowers include tall ageratum, amaranth, celosia, hydrangea, lavender, ornamental oregano, salvia, strawflower, and yarrow. Learn more: [Preserving Buds and Blooms](#).

Flower and Leaf Prints on Fabric

By pounding the plant pigments out of plant parts, you can transfer them directly to fabric, creating decorative patterns to adorn napkins and pillowcases or to make prints for framing. Vibrantly colored plant parts, such as rose petals, pansy flowers, and ferns, work best. Learn more: [Leaf and Flower Prints](#).

Pressed Flowers, Herbs, and Ferns

Place fresh plant material between two sheets of absorbent paper, and then place something heavy on top — a few bricks or big gardening books — or use a homemade plant press. Select relatively flat plant material for the best results. Learn more: [Pressed Flowers and Leaves](#).

Once they're pressed flat, you can:

- Create a collage by attaching leaves and flowers to a sheet of paper with small dabs of glue. Then, frame the collage or photocopy it to make multiple prints. You could also make small collages for notecards.
- Make [Garden Suncatchers](#) that sparkle in the sunlight and create cheer in any room.

Culinary Herbs for Edible Gifts

Many herbs can be dried by gathering them in bunches and hanging them upside down in a dry, dark place. (Find details in the Air-Drying Instructions section in [Preserving Buds and Blooms](#); if the air is too humid for air-drying, dry them in a warm oven or use a food dehydrator.) Dill, marjoram, oregano, rosemary, sage, tarragon, and thyme are good candidates for air drying.

Cover herbs loosely with a paper bag before hanging to keep out dust. Once they're completely dry, you can use the herbs in a variety of ways:

Culinary herb blends: Crumble the dried herbs to create different blends and package them in small bags with a list of the herbs and a recipe card. For example:

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- Dill blend: Mix dried dill, chives, and parsley with garlic granules. Recipe: Mix with cream cheese and spread on crackers; add some sour cream to make a savory dip.
- Italian dressing blend: Combine dried marjoram, thyme, and tarragon. Recipe: Add to oil and vinegar to make a tangy dressing for salads and marinades.
- Ranch blend: Combine dried chives, dill, and parsley with garlic powder. Recipe: Blend with buttermilk and mayonnaise for a creamy salad dressing and dip.

Tea blends: Good tea herbs include bee balm, borage, chamomile, cinnamon basil, fennel, lavender, lemon balm, and mint. Create combinations of dried herbs; consider adding a bit of dried stevia for a touch of sweetness. Learn more: [Grow Your Own Herbal Tea](#) and [Six Easy-to-Grow Herbs](#).

Other culinary gifts include:

- Seasoning salt: Blend a selection of dried herbs, garlic powder, dried chili peppers, and other seasonings with sea salt.
- Infused sugars: Mix dried lavender flowers, dried rose petals, citrus zest, or dried mint with granulated sugar in a jar. Over time, the sugar will absorb the flavors. You can either strain out the plant material first or instruct the gift recipient to do so before using the sugar to top cookies and muffins or to sweeten teas. Learn more: [Edible Flowers](#).
- Herb vinegar: Add robust herbs, such as sage and rosemary, to red wine vinegar. Use white wine vinegar for more delicate herbs, such as dill and tarragon. Add chive flowers for color or dried chilis for heat. Allow the mixture to steep for a few weeks, and then drain through cheesecloth and decant into bottles.
- Garlic braids: Grow softneck garlic varieties and then plait the harvest into decorative braids.

Fragrant Gifts

Combine fragrant dried herbs and flowers to make sachets and potpourri. Fragrant herbs include bay, lemon balm, lemon verbena, sage, rosemary, thyme, lavender, and mint. For potpourri, add color with dried flower petals and additional scent with cinnamon sticks or dried citrus peels. If desired, include a small bottle of essential oil so recipients can refresh the scent with a few drops as needed. Other fragrant gifts include:

- Bath tea bags: Fill small fabric pouches with dried herbs and flowers and, if desired, Epsom salts or milk powder. Instruct recipients to drop a bag or two into water for a luxurious bath.
- Herbal scrubs: Blend granulated sugar with dried, crushed lavender flowers, dried mint or rosemary leaves, or citrus zest, and a touch of light oil, such as grapeseed oil. Instruct recipients to gently rub into skin to exfoliate.

Save and Share Seeds

Saving seeds from plants you've grown is a simple and fun way to spread the joys of gardening. Save seeds from open-pollinated (non-hybrid) plants for best results, and be sure to choose plants that are not invasive in your region. Package the seeds in small envelopes with sowing and growing instructions. Learn more: [Growing and Saving Heirloom Seeds](#). You can even make decorative envelopes using seed catalogs! Learn more: [Seed Catalog Fun](#).

Or, use the seeds (or purchased ones) to make homemade seed paper. Learn more:

- [Homemade Botanical Paper](#)
- [Homemade Paper Valentine Hearts](#)
- [Earth Day Wildflower Seed Paper](#)

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Gifts to Grow Indoors

You can propagate succulents, African violets, and other indoor plants year-round. Give the offspring plants as gifts, or plant them up in small dish gardens or terrariums. Learn more:

- [Grow Baby Succulents](#)
- [Make New Plants and Keep the Old](#)
- [Building a Terrarium](#)

Living Plant Gift Baskets

Everyone loves gift baskets, and it's fun to collect items for them throughout the year. Propagate plants indoors so you have one small plant for each basket, and then round out the gift with homemade or purchased items. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- First Aid basket: Aloe plant, plus calendula or comfrey salve, arnica gel for bruises.
- Herbal Tea for Two basket: Lemon balm plant, two antique/thrift store teacups, sugar cubes or honey.
- Chocolate Lovers basket: Chocolate mint plant, plus a pretty mug, cocoa mix, and foil-covered chocolate treats.
- Sweet Dreams basket: Chamomile plant, soothing tea blends, and a small, homemade book of poetry or sayings.

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