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Into the Garden: Good gardening gadgets around

By Sara Busse

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Garden gadgets galore! I'm a sucker for all the gadgets that are supposed to make gardening easier. But I'm also jaded -- so many of the products that tout simplicity are often complicated. It's like those things that end up in the back of the kitchen gadget drawer -- they are for one specific task that often can be done by common multiuse tools.

Here are a few, however, that pass muster in my book because they are inexpensive, unique or just plain useful.

Plant supports

I have plant supports for my peonies and other top-heavy plants that are circular, sometimes with a grid pattern in the circle, that I'll put out in the spring before the plants grow. But if I forget, well, it's goodnight Irene. It's really hard to control a plant in one of the circles once the plant has grown.

I found metal supports at Green's Feed and Seed that are quite promising. They are basically a half-circle on top of a stake, and they come in a wide variety of sizes. They are cheap, too -- from 69 cents up to \$6 -- and they will fit any plant. I'm using some of the smaller ones on some houseplants, and I'll bet they would be good for top-heavy orchids.

I found similar supports online at www.leevalley.com. Each has an arc-shaped horizontal section, with small ribs to help hold leaves and stems in position, and a stake with a fluted tip to help secure the shaft in the soil. Available in two sizes: 5 3/4 inches long by 3 3/4 inches wide, and 7 3/4 inches long by 5 1/2 inches wide. Colored green to blend with foliage, they come in packages of six and they cost \$5.95.

Rain gauge

It's expensive, but it's really, really cool. It's called a new twist on a classic device. It's the World's Coolest Rain Gauge. Handcrafted in the United States, it's made of solid copper, steel and blue polycarbonate tubing. It's durable and attractive.

According to www.worldscoolestraingauge.com, "The solid copper water collection flute fits into a rust-resistant, powder-coated stand. Empty, it looks like a mild-mannered copper garden accent.

"But inside the flute, an unbreakable blue polycarbonate measurement tube and foam float wait patiently for rain. As rain falls into the collection flute, the blue tube rises to show water levels. Eureka! That's cool!

"It's the original floating rain gauge! Based on the Archimedean principal of water displacement, the unbreakable, easy-read measurement tube rises to show water accumulation."

The 24-inch stake rain gauge is \$44.95 and the 9-inch tabletop gauge is \$49.95.

An easy way to pump

I've already cleaned out and put away the outdoor fountain for the season. But scooping the water out was a mess. At www.slide-n-pump.com, there's a really nice pump that makes short work of pumping and siphoning water anywhere, all without the need of or danger associated with electricity and water. It's one-third the price of electrical pumps.

How does this fit in the gardener's toolbox? Well, it can be used to drain fountains, decorative ponds, birdbaths, post holes and even standing water in the tool shed.

Available in standard size (\$24.99) or mini (\$19.99) plus shipping and handling of \$6 each.

Another pump

This pump is for your rain barrel -- it works via solar power and is easy to install. It provides pressurized water directly from your rain barrel to your outdoor water activities such as watering your lawn or garden, running low-pressure sprinklers or washing your car.

Found at www.rainperfectpump.com, it pumps up to 100 gallons of water on a single charge. It fits standardized garden fixtures and is compatible with all major hose brands. While expensive (\$147.95), it makes it easier to use rainwater, eventually saving money!

Fall color

Barry Glick at Sunshine Farm and Gardens in Renick sent an interesting email recently:

"Autumn can be a very dull and boring time in the garden. You miss all the colorful plants that have delighted you in spring and summer while you're busy deadheading or collecting seeds. The memories of the flowers you've enjoyed are just that, you're wishing there were perennials that would bring you color and joy this time of year and, well, your wish has come true. The 'Plant Genie' wishes to acquaint you with *Allium stellatum*. Commonly known as autumn onion, *Allium stellatum* is a native, fall-blooming perennial that will grow happily anywhere in the U.S.

"Their long-lasting, 2- to 3-inch lavender/pink, starlike blooms seem to explode like fireworks at the tip of their slender 12- to 18-inch arching stems. They look vital for several weeks and make wonderful cut flowers.

"Full sun to light shade is their preference with average to dry soil. *Allium stellatum* has no insect, pest or disease problems. You needn't worry about Bambi or any other critters bothering them either.

"*Allium stellatum* produces new bulbs each growing season, and you can even grow them from seed, although since it takes several years to get a flowering-size bulb from seed, division is the best method to build a colony quickly."

Barry sells the bare-root plants (with free shipping) at the following prices: seven for \$35 (\$5 each); 10 for \$45 (\$4.50 each); 15 for \$60 (\$4 each); 20 for \$70 (\$3.50 each); 50 for \$150 (\$3 each). Larger quantities at even lower prices are available upon request.

If you have any questions about this plant, email ba...@sunfarm.com. If you'd like a return phone call, please state your phone number and the best time to call.

Visit Barry's website at www.sunfarm.com.

Hand-forged ornaments

It's time to purchase hand-forged ornaments created by Wallace Metal Works. This year's ornament is a ginkgo biloba leaf at \$21.20 each. Also, this year Matt and Tessie Wallace will produce a limited-edition 2011 dragonfly ornament -- only 75 will be made. They are \$53 each.

There's a limited supply of dogwood blossom, grape leaf, oak leaf and sugar maple leaf ornaments available.

Payment is by cash or check, and gift boxes are included with the ornaments.

Wallace Metal Works can personalize ornaments for special occasions by hand-stamping the information you choose on the back of any nonlimited-edition ornament. Personalized ornaments are \$37.50.

To arrange payment and pickup, contact Wallace Metal Works at Tes...@wallacemetalworks.com or 304-744-2477. They are on Facebook at www.facebook.com/wallacemetalworks.

The ornaments will be available at the Bridge Road Shops 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 5 as well.

Make a scarecrow

Once again, Valley Gardens will host its annual "Make a Scarecrow" festival. This year's event will benefit St. Jude's Children's Hospital. The family event will take place from 1 to 4 p.m. Oct. 23.

Valley Gardens, 1109 Piedmont Road, 304-342-4636.

Reach Sara Busse at sara.bu...@wvgazette.com or 304-348-1249.

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