

Flora & Fauna

Gifts from the Garden

Whether you're attending an evening soiree or enjoying a weekend visit, it is good manners to present your host with a small gift as a token of your appreciation. Finding the right gift can be a challenge, but luckily your garden can offer some inspiration.

For the host who loves to cook...

Choose a few fresh veggies from your garden, wash them up, and put them in an attractive basket along with a few other ingredients that can make a simple meal. For example, fill a basket with some freshly picked tomatoes, a few clippings of basil, some garlic, an onion, a high-quality olive oil, and some pasta.

Or, transform your basil into a delicious pesto by blending it with some walnuts, garlic, olive oil, and salt. Put it in an attractive jar, and then tie a ribbon around the top. A jar or two of freshly made pesto, some toasted bread chips, and a hunk of Parmegiano-Reggiano cheese will make for an elegant, yet simple combination of delicious flavors.

For the host who loves to decorate...

Nothing spruces up a room quite like fresh flowers. Sure, you can buy pre-made bouquets from the store, but a selection of flowers from your garden adds a personal touch that will make those blooms seem even brighter. Cut some flowers from your garden (leaving as much stem as possible, you can always trim it later) and put them in a vase or wrap the stems with a ribbon to make a bouquet.

Don't limit yourself to just flowers, by the way. You can add some dimension and interesting textures to the arrangement by including large leaves, decorative grass blades, and even small tree branches.

For the host who loves to garden...

If it's early in the growing season, you can present your host with some seeds from your favorite plants. Put them in little envelopes sealed tight with glue or tape. Write the name of the plant along with growing instructions on the packet. Present your host with a few packets tucked inside a little decorative pot.

Some herbs and houseplants can be propagated by taking cuttings and placing them in a pot with very damp soil. This is a great way to share your favorite houseplant with your host. Be sure to take a cutting from the part of the stem with green or new growth. Woody stems tend not to take well. Leave just a couple leaves on the cutting (too few, and the plant won't be able to synthesize light and grow, too many and the leaves will sap energy from the cutting before the roots have time to develop).

It takes a week or two for cuttings to develop root systems, so be sure to plan in advance so you'll have a healthy plant to present to your host.

GUARANTEE SYSTEM.

**1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507
Phone: 616-451-0787
www.guaranteesystem.com**

Cleaning Corner: Keeping Linens Lovely

Keep them white... with lemons! Damask napkins, linens, and even white socks can be whitened on the stove. Simply fill a large pot with water and a few slices of lemons. Bring it to a boil, turn off the heat, and add the linens. Let them soak for about an hour, and then launder as normal. To really brighten them up, spread them out to dry in the sun.

Smooth a wrinkled tablecloth with a spritz of water.

Sometimes, no matter how carefully you iron, a few stubborn wrinkles get left behind. Next time try this: lay the tablecloth on the table with a pad or towel underneath. Lightly spray the wrinkled bits with water and let it dry over night. Gravity will take care of the wrinkles while you sleep!

Rid the red wine stains with some salt. First wet the stain with lukewarm water, and then add a layer of salt. Rub and let it sit for 5 minutes. Pull the fabric tight over a heatproof bowl, and secure with a rubber band. Place the bowl in a sink, and then carefully pour boiling water on the stain.

September

- 1698 In an effort to move his people away from archaic customs, Tsar Peter I of Russia imposes a tax on beards
- 1865 Joseph Lister, inventor of Listerine, performs the first surgery with antiseptic
- 1921 The first Miss America Pageant is held at Atlantic City, NJ
- 1981 Fiona Brothers sets the women's propeller boat speed record of 116.279 miles per hour
- 1954 After nearly 3,000 episodes, the Lone Ranger ends its 21-year legacy of radio drama
- 1976 The unmanned NASA spacecraft Viking Two makes a successful Mars landing to begin its mission of sending color photos back to Earth
- 1999 Viacom announces that it is buying CBS for \$36 billion, making it the largest media acquisition in history

Health Advice: Reasons to Love Oil and Vinegar

The combination of oil and vinegar into a delightful vinaigrette is one of the simplest recipes prized by gourmet chefs around the world. But this combination does far more than just add flavor to your favorite salad greens. From reducing blood pressure to reducing risk of cardiovascular disease, research shows that oil and vinegar benefit a lot more than just your taste buds.

Vinegar has long been prized as a natural cleanser, flavor booster, and home remedy for sore throats and burns. Recent studies now indicate that vinegar may also have promise as a weight-loss aid. Acetic acid, a key component of vinegar, appears to activate genes involved in the breakdown of fats. Other studies indicate that it may also reduce blood pressure and regulate blood sugar. As an added bonus, vinegar also makes the fruits and veggies that you need for good health so much more enticing.

Try this - Add a splash of apple cider vinegar to a sweet salad with apple slices and raisins. Or try adding balsamic vinegar to roasted vegetables or sweet potatoes. For savory salads and marinades for fish and chicken, experiment with a mixture of your favorite champagne and rice wine vinegar.

Olive oil tends to make people nervous. We're told to avoid too many fats and oils (which is true and good advice), but not all oils are bad for us. Olive oil is high in monosaturated fats, which lower the risk of heart disease in several ways. They lower total levels of cholesterol (especially the bad, LDL levels), and they raise the levels of good, HDL levels. Some research suggests that olive oil also offers benefits in terms of preventing colon cancer. Extra virgin and virgin olive oil (the least processed forms of olive oil) contain high levels of polyphenols, which are antioxidants known to reduce the effects of aging on the body.

A word of caution – despite its health benefits, olive oil is quite high in calories, so moderation is the key. In addition, heat, light, and air can affect the taste of olive oil and possibly its health-promoting nutrients. So be sure to store olive oil in a dark cupboard (*not* the one above the stove) or even in the refrigerator. It's also probably best to use it within six months to a year, as the fats and healthy phytonutrients (as well as the taste) can degrade over time.

Try this - For a sweet treat, add the zest (in strips) from two large oranges to one cup of mild olive oil. Or, for something more savory, add a few peppercorns and a sprig of fresh rosemary or thyme instead. Heat the oil over low heat for 10 minutes, and be careful not to let it boil. Let it stand for two hours (to really help the flavors meld), and then strain through a fine sieve. Serve with some bread for dipping and enjoy!

Kid Corner: How to Become the “Cool” Uncle or the “Awesome” Aunt

For many people, it's exciting, strange, and sometimes intimidating to discover that they will soon have a little niece or nephew in their lives. The question that invariably gets asked is “How do I do a good job?”

Contrary to popular belief, being a good uncle or aunt does not involve buying the best or most extravagant birthday and Christmas presents. Much like being a good parent, it's all about being a positive role model and mentor. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you discover your new role:

- **Give your time.** Pitch in and take your niece or nephew off the parents' hands every now and then. Offer to babysit for an evening (or even just an hour) or tag along on a weekend trip to be an extra pair of hands and eyes. Not only will this give you an opportunity to spend some quality time with your niece or nephew, but it will also give the parents some time to relax and recharge.
- **Share your talents.** Can you play a musical instrument? Offer to teach your niece or nephew how to play the piano, bang the drums, or strum a chord on the guitar. Are you an artist? Try an engaging in an art project together. Make a collage, paint a picture, or just sit down with some crayons and a coloring book. Do you love cars or motorcycles? Teach how an engine works, show how to change a tire, or just let him or her honk the horn and make engine noises.
- **Offer your support.** Attend school plays, musical concerts, or sporting events. Cheer on your niece or nephew and show how much you care about their success.
- **Have fun!** Our most favorite memories usually involve doing fun activities with the people we love. In case you're at a loss as to what to do with your niece or nephew, consider some of these fun activities:
 - **Write a story together.** If you don't live near your niece or nephew, try writing letters to one another. (Children who are too young or unable to write can dictate their replies to mom or dad.) He or she will be excited to discover a letter with their name on it waiting in the mail box. You can make these letters even more exciting by starting a story. Write chapter one, and then have your niece or nephew write the next chapter and send it back. It's a wonderful way to connect and encourage a love of reading.
 - **Have an adventure.** Take a trip to a local kid-friendly museum, visit a zoo, or simply go to the park and have a picnic. If your niece or nephew likes trains, buy a round trip ticket, pack a lunch, and spend some time riding the rails.
 - **Unplug and get connected.** Electronics (computers, TV, video games, etc.) are a big part of our lives. But despite the ways they can make our lives easier, sometimes they get in the way of us connecting. So try unplugging all the electronics and plan some fun, computer-free activities. Go fly kites together, go out for ice cream, or just play hopscotch with chalk on the driveway.

Vinaigrettes are exceptionally easy to prepare with a nearly endless combination of flavors. Here are a few tasty varieties you can try to liven up salads or use as gourmet marinades for chicken or fish. Simply add the ingredients listed below to a blender and combine until smooth. Serve at room temperature.

Raspberry Vinaigrette

- 2 Tbs raspberry vinegar
- 2 Tbs raspberry preserves
- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

Bacon Vinaigrette

- 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup cider vinegar
- 2 Tbs bacon fat
- 1 Tbs brown sugar
- 1 Tbs Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp fresh ground black pepper

Herb Parmesan Vinaigrette

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup grated fresh parmesan cheese
- 2 Tbs white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp dried herbs such as oregano, basil, thyme, or a blend
- 1 Tbs Dijon mustard
- Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Wasabi Vinaigrette

- 1/2 tsp wasabi paste
- 1 Tbs rice vinegar
- 1 Tbs soy sauce
- 3 Tbs extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Six Tasks for the Autumn To-Do List

As autumn approaches, it's a good idea to start preparing your home for cooler temperatures and winter weather conditions. Here's a short list of suggestions for your "To-Do" list this fall:

- 1. Insulate Outlets and Switches.** You may think your house is sealed up pretty tight, but electrical outlets and light switches are two places where heat can escape (and cold air can get in!). Purchase foam switch and outlet gaskets from your local hardware store. Unscrew the cover, press the foam in place, and replace the cover. Insert plastic childproof shock guards to stop even smaller drafts from entering unused outlets.
- 2. Change your air filter.** The air filter in your air return duct helps keep the air in your home clean by reducing the dust, pollen, and other debris that may be floating around your air ducts. Be sure to replace (or wash thoroughly, if you have a washable one) your air filter regularly. **Bonus tip:** Write the date on your filter when you install a new one. This way, there will be no doubt as to when you changed it last!
- 3. Prepare Your Snowblower.** The time to discover that your snowblower is in need of repairs is not when you're faced with several inches of white stuff on the ground! Start it up now, change the oil, replace the spark plug, inflate tires, and spray the discharge chute with silicone to keep it from clogging.
- 4. Clean the chimney.** We all enjoy sitting by a warm fire on a cold night, but a dirty chimney is a serious fire and carbon monoxide hazard. Call a professional to give your chimney a thorough inspection and a good scrubbing to get rid of the built-up soot. **Have an electric heater?** Give it a good dusting before turning it on.
- 5. Bring in the lawn furniture.** Even though there may be a few dog days of summer left, it's a good idea to bring in the outdoor furniture and seat cushions. Wash furniture before you store it (a bucket with soapy water, thick sponge, and a quick rinse with the garden hose should do the trick). This helps get rid of summer dirt and bugs.
- 6. Clean the gutters.** Remove all those dead leaves to prevent clogs when the wetter, colder weather comes in. Otherwise your drains will overflow and result in heavy ice buildup, which can sometimes damage gutters.

... Carpet Talk... Prevent Color Loss

Just like any colored fabric, carpet can fade and lose its color if not properly cared for. Here are a few things you can do to prevent color loss in your carpet.

Keep Out the Sun! We all love bright, sunny rooms, but too much direct sunlight will fade your carpeting. So when you're not in a room, pull the shades closed.

Keep Hands and Feet Clean! You may not realize it, but the chemicals and products you handle regularly can inadvertently stain your carpet. Bleach, acne medications, even athlete's foot medication can remove the color from your carpet. So make sure you and the other people in your household wash their hands and keep socks on their feet.

Treat Pet Stains Immediately! If Fluffy or Fido has an accident on the carpet, clean it up as quickly as possible. Pet urine that is left on carpeting can cause permanent color loss.

Call the Professionals! Many stains on carpet become color loss situations when consumer products are used incorrectly. These products can chemically "burn" or destroy carpet fibers in the process. More importantly, certain stains require very specific treatments to properly remove the stain. Using the wrong type of chemical can permanently "set" the stain or destroy the fibers, as stated above.

So when faced with tricky spots and stains, call Guarantee System at 616-451-0787. We've got the right tools and products to you're your carpet, and its color!

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1518 Steele Ave SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49507

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GUARANT@ SYSTEM.

Phone: 616-451-0787

Fax: 616-451-8303

www.guaranteesystem.com

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