

gifts from the garden

by Anne Carver, California



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Gardeners are generous. They are known for sharing the delights and rewards found through gardening. Why not continue this worthy tradition by creating gifts to give from your garden? Who knows, maybe a gift from your garden will sprout a lifelong gardening passion in someone else.

Share your garden's bounty by making "Sunshine Tomatoes" and uniquely flavored vinegars. Both creations make wonderful gifts and both are simple to make.

For Sunshine Tomatoes, mix 8 chopped vine-ripened tomatoes, 1 cup good olive oil, ¼ cup balsamic vinegar, 2 T roughly chopped fresh basil, 3 cloves minced garlic, 1 t sugar, 1 thinly sliced red onion, and salt and pepper to taste. Put all ingredients into a glass jar and cover tightly. Set the jar in the full sun for four or five hours like you would sun tea, then refrigerate; they'll keep handsomely in the refrigerator for two weeks. Try Sunshine Tomatoes over salad as a dressing, as a dip, or over hot pasta as a sauce. For a gift, add directions and suggested uses and decorate the container.

Flavored vinegars are popular additions to salad dressings, marinades, and sauces. Any culinary herb or spice can make these inexpensive flavored vinegars. Use the following basic recipe as a guide to shape your own concoctions. Avoid using white vinegar as a base because it is too harsh for the delicate herb flavors. Instead, choose either white wine vinegar, champagne vinegar, or rice vinegar.

Place 3 cups vinegar; ¼ cup fresh herbs; and other flavorings like garlic cloves, peppercorns, or citrus peel into a glass bottle. (Use chopsticks to position larger items.) If making a large batch, mix first in a large glass jar, then pour into individual bottles and finish by adding fresh sprigs of herbs. Let the mixture steep for one to two weeks in a sunny window. For a gift, simply add a bow and a favorite recipe.

Start off by trying classic blends for your vinegar such as rosemary, oregano, and garlic, or lemon peel, bay leaves, peppercorns, and basil. As you gain experience with blending herbs, you can design a signature blend.

There are many other gifts from the garden you can make "dirt cheap"—potpourri, rooted cuttings, dried flowers, and bulbs all make lovely gifts. Gifts from your garden add heart to any occasion. Find more ideas at www.thethriftygardener.com.

