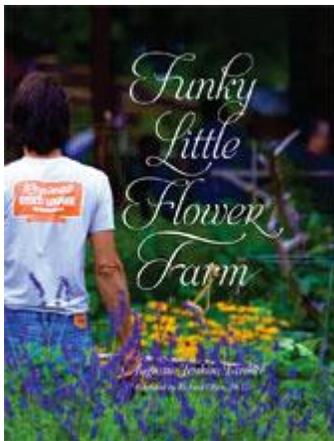


Written by By Will Balk, Jr.

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Fortunately for a lazy gardener like me – I’m a reluctant shopper, to boot – there’s still a little time left in this holiday gift-giving season to find the right gift for those difficult gardeners on your list. There’s time . . . but I always seem to be challenged with the inspiration part. I really don’t want to give the usual or expected; I want to come up with something meaningful and special, something unique, something the recipient will value.

Some ideas, useful to a true gardener, will be received happily – but they’re beginning to seem just a little obvious for me to select as a gift this year. I’m thinking of bags of potting mix or of mulch, or beautiful new limb loppers or a shovel. Always welcome, but sort of like giving one’s spouse a vacuum cleaner for Christmas.

Other gift ideas, perhaps like a subscription to *Fine Gardening* or a gift certificate from a favorite nursery or orchid grower, will certainly delight the recipient; but I’m looking for a gift with just a bit more personality – my personality, maybe – attached.

I wasn’t having much success coming up with any new ideas for a perfect gardener’s gift . . . and, then, I remembered Jenks Farmer’s wonderful new book, *Funky Little Flower Farm*. I’ve already gotten three copies, quickly shared with special friends, and I’ll be giving them to other gardeners this year – and all next year, and the year afterward, too.

About five years ago, Jenks wrote another gorgeous book, *Deep Rooted Wisdom*, published by the superb Timber Press, devoted to returning gardening to its traditional role of feeding the body and soul. Filled with lifetimes of gardening experience gleaned from old-timers and experimenters, Jenks (who is a natural story teller and an exuberant acolyte of those whose lives and personal journeys bring insight, appreciation, and joy to gardening and to living) made a book full of wisdom and inspiration – and some absolutely beautiful photographs to make his point. In fact, I wrote a review of that book for *Lowcountry Weekly*; check the online archives

for How Does your Garden Grow under “Lifestyle” at LCWeekly.com. The date is April 8, 2014.

The new book, self-effacingly titled *Funky Little Flower Farm*, provides excellent information for the gardener year ‘round, tied quite specifically to the seasons and rhythms of the commercial flower farm of the title, to the family that makes the farm a unique and beautiful effort to continue the farming role of the property that has existed for more than two centuries. It is located in lower-middle South Carolina, so the growing information is relevant to Lowcountry gardeners. It is, however, perfectly useful for a much broader area of gardening climates and gardeners’ obsessions.

Many readers of this column will already know Jenks Farmer’s name. He is a peripatetic presence over much of the eastern half of the US, speaking frequently and entertainingly about his specialty, the flowering lily genus *Crinum*. He is a sought after garden designer and plantsman. He is the founding director of the award-winning Riverbanks Botanical Garden and designed Darla Moore’s famous new Moore Farms Botanic Garden. In addition to the two books mentioned here, Jenks also has maintained – and periodically updated – one of the definitive guides to *Crinum* lilies, *Gardening With Crinum Lilies, Vol I and II*.

There’s my brilliant suggestion for the season’s gift for a gardener: *Funky Little Flower Farm*. Your local independent book shop may stock it, , order it at that online giant, or you can contact Jenks at his funky flower farm to order it online at www.jenksfarmer.com.

If you go online to check out the book or to order it, be sure to visit Jenks’s site to see just what they are doing at that beautiful historic farm.

In fact, that brings to mind other brilliant gift ideas for the discerning gardener. How about planning a special trip to a unique place with your gardening friend – perhaps several, bothe several places and several friends?

Charleston Horticultural Society has a remarkable lecture series and a famous Fall Garden Tour (www.chashortsoc.org). That’s a short drive and a beautiful way to spend a day.

For a longer trip, one which promises delights galore – and one which might change a gardener’s life and garden forever – consider giving your friend a trip (with you going along, of course!) to the incredible Plant Delights Nursery and Botanic Garden near Raleigh, NC. , Usually closed to the public, Plant Delights opens four times a year for fabulous tours and plant sales. The founder, Tony Avent, is kind of a wise, wacky guru of the plant world, and he has made Plant Delights into a hort-nut’s fantasyland. Check out the dates at Plant Delights’ website, www.plantdelights.com, and browse around the amazing website for all kinds of ideas.

Another close destination, perfect for a gift trip with your friend and several other gardeners is the Riverbanks Botanic Garden in Columbia. It is, of course, part of the huge riverside complex with the Riverbanks zoo, and it is easy to include the zoo as part of a day trip with the Botanic Garden. Frankly, for an enthusiastic gardener, the Garden is enough of a destination for the day.

The Botanic Garden has a full calendar of events all year, but the gardens themselves are the real destination. Each season makes for a different kind of visit, so multiple visits may be called for. Be sure to check out their website (<https://www.riverbanks.org/botanical-garden/>) for directions and to see what events are coming up on the calendar.

There is also the South Carolina Botanical Garden. You and your gift-receiving friend can make this longer drive all the way to Clemson to see these extensive plantings, where the curators have created a model tour of all of the state's ecological/gardening zones among the site's 300 acres, providing inspiration and ideas aplenty for almost any garden situation in the state. There's a strong emphasis on native plantings and on native wildlife, so the state botanic garden looks and feels a bit different from any other botanic garden you may have visited. A map and general information are available at the website, <https://www.clemson.edu/public/scbg/>.

Which brings me back to Jenks Farmer and his Funky Little Flower Farm. Jenks and his family welcome visitors to the farm occasionally each year. Tours by garden-affiliated groups can be scheduled with advance planning; once or twice during the year, the farm extends an invitation to friends of the farm for a day of family festivities, animals, and picnic lunch. If you're an established customer of the lily farm, you just might get invited to visit – and it's a pleasant drive up to the Aiken/Augusta area. That's a day to remember, and a really wonderful gift for a very special gardener friend – and like the other suggested gifts of garden trips, it's twice as enjoyable and three times as meaningful if these are trips shared among gardening friends.

Happy gift-giving, friends!