

# Alys Fowler

## A Japanese razor hoe for me, please, Santa...



I have received two excellent gifts recently. One was a huge bag of quinces, their perfume so strong that it wafted through the house. The other gift was a Japanese razor hoe, which is a sharp angled hoe, about 30cm long, which is drawn towards you (Burgon & Ball, [burgonandball.com](http://burgonandball.com), £11.95). My mother gave me this. She bought one for herself and was so impressed after only 20 minutes that she went straight out and bought one for me.

It's very useful. You can slice weeds, dig up more persistent roots, dib holes for young seedlings or bulbs, and slice through compacted soil. It's so strong that you can also use it to do things it was never invented for. It is surprisingly good at lifting up paving slabs. I am deeply in love with this tool.

Fifty-plus years of gardening means my mother can spot a good tool at 50 paces. If she likes it, we all should. Recommendation is important - far too many tools claim to make digging easier, but don't.

Gifts such as this are perfect for gardeners. Christopher Lloyd was adamant that you should not give gardeners plants. He felt they were an imposition. What if they didn't flourish or were unsuitable? Flaming dahlias are not to everyone's taste, particularly

once you're lumbered with their ongoing care. He advised giving cut flowers or garden produce. I made membrillo from the quinces and it is wrapped in greaseproof paper ready to become Christmas gifts - my favourite present is one that is recyclable.

But if you have neither produce nor recommendations to give away, then a good read is a good gift, particularly in the winter (no gardener will read much come summer).

Farm City: The Education Of An Urban Farmer by Novella Carpenter (£10, from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)) is one of the most witty, captivating tales of raising food in a ghetto in Oakland, California. The minute I finished it, I dreamed of putting a pig on my Christmas wishlist.

In a similar vein is Talking To Zeus: My Year In A Greek Garden by Jane Shaw (£4.87, from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)). It's about an internship on an organic garden in Greece - a moving account of becoming a gardener. It is also a master class in gardening without much water. Both books were impossible to put down.

All gardeners are secretly obsessed with nail brushes - or they have dirty nails and need one. I like the ones from Labour and Wait ([labourandwait.co.uk](http://labourandwait.co.uk)). They are not cheap at £8, but are gentle enough to leave your fingers

intact. That and a block of good soap makes a perfect gift.



DAN MATTHEWS FOR THE GUARDIAN