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San Francisco Chronicle

Shopping the garden show

Lynette Evans, Home&Garden Editor

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The San Francisco Flower & Garden Show, through Sunday at the Cow Palace, attracts tens of thousands of garden lovers each year. And, with 23 major garden exhibits plus hundreds of smaller displays and market booths, the show has something for everyone - even a few things for kitchen gardeners.



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Sure, the bones of a good garden may be the same whether one is growing flowers and shrubs or fruits and vegetables, and the soil needs equal attention, but on a walk through this year's show, looking specifically for help in the kitchen garden, I found only a few things that caught my eye. Those that did are worth noting:

-- Root Gel, a domed six-pack tray containing a concentrated gel of hormones, nutrients and moisture that is "safe and non-toxic." You simply make a hole through the foil top of one of the containers and stick your soft- stem cutting into the gel. \$14.95 for the Gel Propagator; \$12.95 per quart for refills. At Charley's Greenhouse & Garden booth at the entrance to the Petal Plaza Marketplace, or through www.charleysgreenhouse.com. Maybe this is what I need to get those cuttings to root; nothing else I've tried seems to work.

-- Hori-Hori Deluxe Digging Tool by Joshua Roth Limited. Made in Japan, this wicked-looking curved tool looks like a cross between a hunting knife and a slim trowel. In stainless steel with one sawtooth edge, it is sharp enough to disembowel a gopher or cut through the toughest weed's root system. \$35 from Wildflower Seed Co. of the Napa Valley (St. Helena) in the Petal Plaza Marketplace, online at www.wildflower-seed.com or (800) 456-3359. I have a similar tool that I use all the time to dig the Bermuda grass out of the vegetable beds and from between the

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bricks on the garden paths.

-- Victorinox Cut-and-Hold Shears that hang onto a bunch of herbs you've just cut. While the blades make a clean cut, unlike with scissors, the cut foliage doesn't fall away but stays with the shears until you release them. By the people who make Swiss Army knives, \$21, from Wildflower Seed Co. The shears work well, but I would have liked a looped handle rather than the straight wood handles of this tool. Wildflower Seeds also carries Cut-and-Hold Pruners, \$29; and telescoping Cut-and-Hold Pruners, \$49, which allow you to pick fruit high up on a tree without having to let it fall or to prune the interior of a vine without having to reach in afterward to pull the cutting off.

-- Simply Dump It Pivoting Wheelbarrow Handles, made of hardened nylon that fit over a wheelbarrow's handles to let you dump the barrow without straining your wrists. \$19.95 from MAS Un Limited in Waldport, Ore., at the Simply Dump It booth in the Meadow Market or at www.simplydumpit.com.

-- Italian vegetable seeds: Franchi Old World Italian Seeds from Daylight Farms in Half Moon Bay in the Meadow Market Hall. The booth is also selling Genovese basilio (sweet basil) and pomodoro 'Cuor di bue' (heirloom tomato) seedlings at \$1 each.

-- Seeds from an English garden: Alan Titchmarsh Cottage Garden Seeds, including organic and baby vegetables, such as 'King Richard' leeks, 'Shakespeare' brown pickling onions and 'Lancer' parsnips. Also Windowsill Growing Kits that come in Indian, Mediterranean, Mexican or Herbs of the World varieties from English Garden Emporium of Manchester Center, Vt., www.englishgardenemporium.com or (800) 347-8130, in the Sapling Square Plant Market.

-- Mushroom-growing kits and advice on growing edible and medicinal mushrooms from Fungi Perfecti LLC of Olympia, Wash., next to the English Garden Emporium in the Sapling Square Plant Market, or from www.fungi.com or (800) 780-9126.

-- Olive trees, a popular tree for our Mediterranean climate with fruit that is easier to cure than most people think. Two-foot 'Frantoio' and 'Pendolino' olive trees, \$15 each, from the Cottage Gardens of Petaluma in the Sapling Square Plant Market or at www.cottagegardensofpet.com, (707) 778-8025.

-- Worm farms and composters: the Worm Factory, a three, four- or five- tray upward migration composting worm bin system that employs red wiggler worms to turn kitchen waste into nutrient-rich worm castings and "compost tea." \$89.95 to \$99.95 from Cascade Sales of Bellingham, Wash., in the Sapling Square Plant Market, or from www.cascadesales.com; (360) 592-5970. The company also was selling the 8-cubic-foot Tumbleweed Compost Maker, approximately \$200, that tumbles your compost so you don't have to turn it by hand -- a most strenuous job for gardeners and possibly the reason more of us don't compost regularly.

-- Organic products: In the Sapling Square Plant Market, you'll find booths offering Whitney Farms natural organic plant foods and soil enhancers, www.whitneyfarms.com; Wonder Grow All Natural

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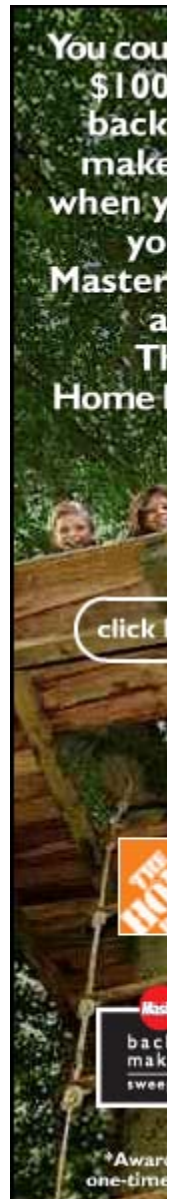
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Organic Foliar Spray Plant Food, www.wondergrow.com or (888) 460-8536; and Peace of Mind organic products, the latter at the Sierra Greenhouse booth, which will shortly include the products on its Web site: www.sierragreenhouse.com. This was the only place outside of Wal-Mart that I've found Serenade, an organic fungicide that takes care of the leaf curl on my peach trees.

-- Good advice: Education booths in the Meadow Market can answer a slew of gardening questions, from composting to dealing with insect pests in the least toxic manner to keeping bees. And don't forget to stop by the California Rare Fruit Growers exhibit in the Meadow Market main hall.

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