

Perfect gift certificate for local nursery

Protesters get flushed from public parks for demanding justice. Debt-ridden economies overseas threaten a full-blown money-system collapse. A food system based on long-distance travel, packaging, and credit-card swiping starts to run low on resources.

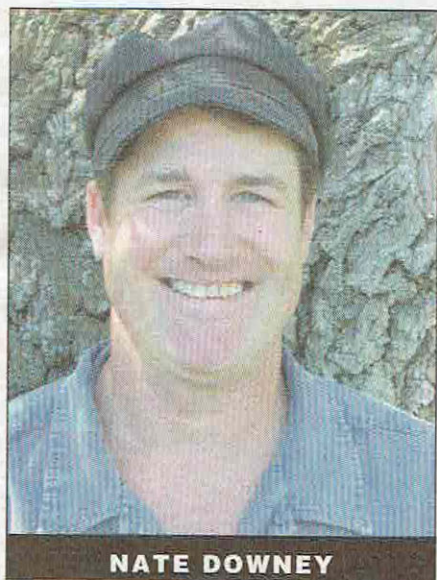
We live in tenuous times, so a permacultural approach to holiday gift-giving is especially appropriate. On the physical plane, think durable, useful, local, recycled, and reusable. On a spiritual level, consider gifts that inspire, motivate, and empower people to become more attuned to their purpose in life.

In any age, but especially at this moment of peak everything, life's purpose is clear. We should strive to become more self-reliant as individuals and help our families, friends, communities, and all peoples of the world do the same.

One easy way to do this is to give gifts (or gift certificates) from any of the eight or 10 local plant nurseries. Each has its specialty, and every one of them has endless permacultural presents to offer.

If the ground is soft enough (which it often is in winter on the south side of trees, walls, and buildings here in northern New Mexico), now is a great time to plant trees and shrubs. They love to be transplanted when their root systems are not immediately charged with working like gangbusters. If you plant cold-tolerant plants in cold weather, the root systems of what you plant can slowly get used to their new environment and accelerate quickly as temperatures gradually increase. (If the soil is too hard to dig, you can always insulate trees and shrubs over the winter in a thick bed of straw.)

In addition to plants, most of the nurseries also sell garden tools, organic soil-building products, and - my favorite - books. This year in addition to *Harvest the Rain* (see below), I'm recommending *City Chicks* (Good Earth Publications, 2010) by Patricia Foreman. The author and I took



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a permaculture class with Bill Mollison nearly 20 years ago, and she will be staying with us while she is in the area promoting her book, but that's not why I suggest you buy *City Chicks*.

I know of no other resource that contains more information about raising poultry and eggs in the comfort of your own backyard (or front yard or side yard). At a whopping 464 pages, the book spans 20 chapters. At the outset, readers quickly learn the benefits of raising chickens. They soon jump into sections about using hens in the garden, growing food for chickens, soil building with domestic birds, and choosing the right variety of fine-feather fowl for your particular needs and desires.

Chicken-coop design gets ample treatment. Over a dozen photos will help novice and experienced carpenters through the building process. Readers will also learn how best to integrate layer boxes, waterers, and feeders in order to save time and hassle. We've kept chickens for many years. They're easy to keep alive and provide delicious homegrown food. I love how they draw folks into the garden.

You can meet Foreman (and buy her book!) at the Santa Fe Farmers' Market on Saturday, Dec. 17. She'll be there at Collected Works' book table from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Nate Downey is president of Santa Fe Permaculture (505-424-4444) and the author of the just-released book, Harvest the Rain: How to Enrich Your Life by Seeing Every Storm as a Resource (Sunstone Press).