



GRAY'S GARDEN CENTER



DOWN TO EARTH



Local artisan **Howard Beers** makes cute, functional and safe bird condos (various prices) that utilize wood from the coast and are way underpriced. Gray's also carries the quirky **No/No Bird Feeder** (\$35.99). This copper sunflower seed feeder is squirrel damage resistant and dishwasher safe, flattens easily for shipping and helps protect wild birds from avian diseases with a wire mesh design.

If you haven't yet caught bird fever, then some new gardening products might be a better option. Down to Earth recently started to stock **Bionic gardening gloves** (\$39.99), gloves that put all others to shame. These sheepskin gloves were

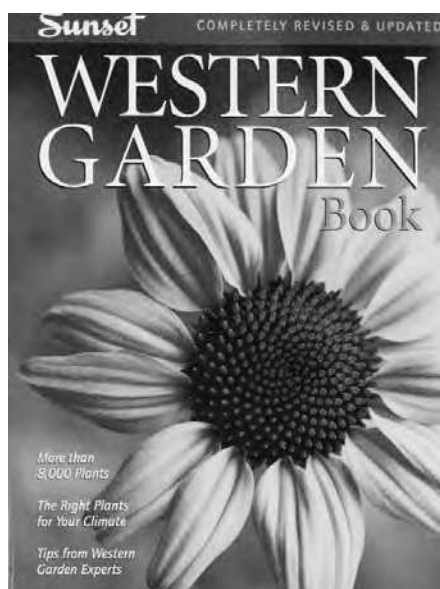
designed by renowned hand surgeons and have anatomic relief pads to help reduce pain and fatigue as well as a sleek ergonomic design. They're a little expensive for gloves, but as we all know, finding a well-made product that will last long is well worth the extra price.

For a tried and true gift, Gray's has what staff call the "garden bible" — **Sunset's Western Garden Book** (\$34.95). It has tips from western garden experts and a listing of more than 8,000 plants, and it can tell you the right plants for this climate.

Down to Earth carries several Monopoly spinoffs; the one for green thumbs is called **Gardenopoly** (\$27.50). The game's traditional figures have been replaced with a garden gnome, lady bug, garden clog, earthworm and hand trowel, but the game company kept the original wheelbarrow and did an upgrade on it. The properties have names like Tulip Turnpike, Sunflower Street and Annual Alley. A cute addition comes from the gardening facts and tips on the back of every deed. In addition, both stores carry garden tchochkes, like the dragonfly tile, and useful gifts like compostable pots.

That means all my gift giving bases have been covered, and I even have money and time to spare. My advice is to take your mom seriously when she says that all she wants for the holidays is potting soil. Believe me, she's not kidding. ■

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