

• New Ideas and Gadgets •

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☛ **SABLE-TIPPED LIPBRUSH** is protected in a decorated case of acetate plastic. A push button releases the brush and retracts it when not in use so that the brush is kept sanitary and cannot stain other articles in a handbag.

• Science News Letter, 79:48 January 21, 1961

☛ **WALL SCROLL** comes in two designs hand-screened on textured cotton and framed in ebony. An abstract design is black and red on natural; also on natural cotton is a Roman goddess in black and gray. Each scroll measures 17 x 47 inches.

• Science News Letter, 79:48 January 21, 1961

☛ **VENETIAN BLIND COATING**, a water-like fluid, makes painted blind surfaces so slick dirt cannot cling. The coating leaves a clear, colorless film that is insoluble in water, lasts indefinitely and does not discolor slats. The blinds stay clean longer and then are easier to clean.

• Science News Letter, 79:48 January 21, 1961

☛ **PLASTIC ANIMAL SCULPTURES** that look as if handcarved from a block of fine walnut are executed with great intricacy. Unlike wood sculptures, the tough acetate plastic figures, shown in the photograph, require no more care than an occasional dusting or wiping with a damp



cloth. The 12 figures in the series include horses, cattle and dogs.

• Science News Letter, 79:48 January 21, 1961

☛ **WORLD WIDE MONEY GUIDE** for travelers shows the exact value of United States money in foreign currency. Easy to

use, the guide is in a handy pocket size with case in red or black with gold.

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☛ **HOUSEHOLD LOCK** enables the homeowner to keep his door chain-locked while at home or away. The device combines the ordinary chain-and-slide with a key-operated cylinder lock. To unchain the door from inside, the slide is released. A key permits unlocking the cylinder lock from outside the partly opened door.

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☛ **FISHING FLY AND HOOK BOXES** have permanently attached magnetic strips to hold hooks and flies in an orderly way for easy selection. Hook box holds fishing hooks with leaders up to eight inches long; fly box has two strips to hold the flies.

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☛ **AIR PURIFIER** is a portable, five-pound unit which can be plugged into any electrical outlet. Of spun anodized aluminum, the device forces air through activated carbon, purifying and recirculating the air. Useful in various home areas, it will destroy undesirable odors, prevent smoke irritation, and provide relief from many allergies.

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Nature Ramblings



► **FAR TO THE NORTH**, on the Arctic tundra, reindeer, caribou and musk ox are scraping the snow for a favorite food, reindeer moss. This "moss" is not a moss at all, but a type of lichen. In Nova Scotia, the Acadia of Longfellow's poem, the "murmuring pines and the hemlocks, bearded with moss," the "moss" is, again, a lichen.

For many years, lichens were thought to be a separate phylum of plants, but they are actually an intimately interwoven web of fungi and algae. Living in this symbiotic, or mutually beneficial, relationship, the fungi are mildly parasitic on the algae, from which they receive their food, and, in return, are believed to aid the algae in absorbing and retaining water. Lichen algae can be grown without the lichen fungi, but the fungi cannot survive without the algae.

Lichens are divided into three general groups: Fruticose lichens are erect or hanging, branched structures; foliose lichens are flattened, often leaf-like bodies, and crustose lichens form hard, granular crusts on rocks and bark.

Lichens



From bleak mountaintop to arid desert lichens can be expected to show up in most unlikely places. Their various colors, from white to yellow, orange, yellowish-green, grayish-green, brown or black, are displayed on fenceposts, tombstones, tree bark or the foundations of old houses.

Lichens have served as food since pre-Christian times. Fragments have been found in foodstuffs in Egyptian tombs, and the manna mentioned in the Bible is believed to have been the lichen, *Lecanora sculeuta*, which is still eaten by desert

tribes of Asia Minor. In the subarctic areas and in India and Japan lichens are harvested and dried for human or domestic-animal food. Lower forms of life, such as mites, caterpillars, earwigs, termites, snails and slugs, also feed on certain lichen species.

Numerous medicinal benefits have been attributed to lichens. Although most of the so-called benefits are without scientific basis, one lichen from Iceland produces a mucilaginous substance that has laxative properties. This substance also is used in salves, puddings, culture media for bacteria, sizings for paper and calicoes, and in isinglass.

Other lichens serve as ingredients for cosmetics, while still others contain tannins and are used for tanning animal hides. In certain areas of Russia and Siberia, lichens are substituted for hops in the brewing of beer.

Perhaps the most widely used product from lichens is the dye known as litmus, a chemical indicator of acidity and alkalinity.

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