

# • New Machines and Gadgets •

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**LAWN SPRINKLER** looks a bit like a four-petal, metal flower. But each lily-like petal is a baffle that can be raised or lowered for any spray pattern desired. Thus, you can spray a full circle, a half-circle, a quarter-circle or a narrow strip. Large flared-edge circular base slides smoothly over the lawn.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**PICNIC BOX-TABLE.** Carry your family's picnic to the beach in this handy box. Unfold the four steel legs of the box and remove the box lid. Then the sides fold down and you have a table for four. The box is covered inside and out with washable plastic. The plastic on the inside, or table top, has a gay, checkerboard pattern.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**DRAPERY HANGING AID,** a strip of nylon plastic with holes in it, may be sewn into the top of your drapes. Drapery hooks fit into the holes so that the drapes hang evenly. Since the hooks never touch the fabric, there are no holes, rips or tears.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**DESKTOP COMPUTER,** shown in the photograph, about the size of a TV set, is designed for small engineering and research



firms. If the firm grows and its problem-solving needs increase, this electronic computer can grow too. Additional components simply plug in until the desktop model becomes a complex floor model.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**REFRIGERATION UNIT** of the do-it-yourself variety lets you convert an ice chest into a refrigerator for your boat or

camping trailer. If you are handy, you can make the conversion without special tools in about four hours. The unit operates from a 12-volt auto storage battery and takes up less room than a 25-pound block of ice.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**ROUND HAND FILE** can enlarge holes and cut decorative patterns in wood, aluminum, plastics, plywood and asphalt tile. It features self-cleaning, individually hardened cutting teeth.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**FAUCET SEAT REFACER.** When your faucet leaks because its valve seat needs re-surfacing, this simple refacer will scrape off pitted areas and give the valve seat a smooth surface. You simply remove the faucet's handle, insert the refacer as directed and rotate it.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960

**BAIT BUCKET** features a built-in air pump for aerating the water in the bucket. By using the pump every 12 to 24 hours, a fisherman can help keep his bait alive and healthy. A safety valve prevents over-pumping. The aluminum bucket holds up to 120 live minnows and it floats.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960



## Nature Ramblings



**MUSKRATS** are pretty much "lone wolves" for, as a rule, they like to live alone except for their brief period of family life or when they find it too cold to sleep alone.

They build their hummocks of grasses, twigs, leaves and mud throughout most of the country with the exception of parts of Florida, Texas and California. Wherever there is still or slowly moving water, fresh or salt, the muskrat makes its home. This may be along the margins of streams and ponds, in inland swamps and coastal marshes.

Unlike their larger cousins, the beaver, muskrats do not build elaborate dams to regulate the water supply. They make the best of what they find available and often settle close to towns if food and water are abundant.

The muskrat has long sharp claws and its hind feet are longer than its forefeet and partly webbed. It moves rather awkwardly on land and thus offers an easy prey for hawks, owls, snapping turtles, foxes, raccoons, weasels and coyotes. But it

### The Muskrat



will always defend itself savagely if cornered.

In the water, however, the muskrat is far more agile. It is an excellent swimmer and a fast and silent diver. This is fortunate for, even in the water, it has to be on the alert for enemies among such equally good swimmers as the mink and the otter.

Mainly a vegetarian, the muskrat finds its food both in the water and on the land.

Succulent aquatic plants like cattails, flags and lily pond roots are preferred, but other plants and bushes growing near the hummocks are also eaten.

Whenever they are available, the muskrat enjoys eating shellfish, salamanders and frogs, and even small fish. Clams and mussels, which it opens by biting the tough ligament at the back of the shell or by prying the shell apart with its teeth, are the favorites.

In the south, the muskrat breeds all year round, while in the north, it breeds from spring to autumn. In either case, it has several litters annually. Litters may number from three to 11, averaging three or four in the south and five or six in the north.

More than 10,000,000 muskrat pelts come to market each year, 3,000,000 from Louisiana alone. This, together with the fact that the carcasses are sold for meat ("marsh rabbit" or "marsh hare") in some areas, makes the muskrat one of the most useful of small American mammals.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1960