

# • New Ideas and Gadgets •

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⚙️ **SHOE-CARE CABINET** is equipped with no-odor polishes requiring no brushing, and a special shine cloth. The step-on cabinet has walnut finish and antique brass fittings. Besides a foot-rest for shoe shining, it is also a handy stool for youngsters and adults to reach high places.

• Science News Letter, 79:80 February 4, 1961

⚙️ **PLASTIC AIR SPRAY** protects surfaces against rust, moisture and corrosion. The flexible vinyl plastic is resistant to temperature extremes. The clear, transparent coating adds years to the life of marine accessories, auto bumpers and other chrome parts, farm and garden tools. Aluminum screens, storm doors, outdoor furniture are protected against pitting and discoloration.

• Science News Letter, 79:80 February 4, 1961

⚙️ **PILL BOX** can be set to sound an alarm to remind pill-takers to take medicine on schedule. The Swiss-made timing device and pill container weighs only one ounce, is as small as a silver dollar in diameter and about 3/4 inch thick. It comes in six colors with owner's initial or a good-luck charm in center.

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⚙️ **WHEELED CARRIER**, all-welded steel frame on rubber tires, becomes a snow plow, shown in the photograph, by fastening "snow-wings" to steel arms. It clears a 21-



inch swath of snow with minimum effort. It can also be converted to haul garbage cans and other large objects.

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⚙️ **MOUSE CAGE** that with disposable bottom saves commercial and private breeders of mice time, energy and money expended in washing, sterilizing and maintaining other types of cages. The easily-stacked bottoms are of tough plastic and

can be incinerated. One thousand cages occupy only 10 cubic feet of space, a saving of almost 90% in space required for metal cages.

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⚙️ **CRYSTAL-GROWING KIT** for hobbyists interested in the icicle-like formations that appear and grow in chemicals includes directions and a generous supply of chemicals required. It makes possible the study of factors affecting the growth and behavior of crystals.

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⚙️ **CHARCOAL SNUFFER** designed to snuff briquets left over from a barbecue reduces charcoal consumption. The snuffed briquets start easier and faster than new briquets. The aluminum-copper-silicon alloy container makes possible many more barbecues from a 10-pound bag of charcoal than usually obtained.

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⚙️ **ALUMINUM ART CANVAS** has the textured surface of canvas and linen but is more durable and easier to paint on. The metal canvas will take oil, casein, water color or air brush and will not chip, crack or buckle. Available in standard canvas sizes as well as larger sizes, the new art product is light in weight and easy to store.

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## Nature Ramblings



➤ **WHETHER OR NOT** the rodent supposedly endowed with weather predicting ability is called a marmot or a woodchuck on other days of the year, his name is Groundhog on Feb. 2.

There is some difference of opinion as to when and where this myth began. It may have existed in Europe as long ago as pre-Christian times when the hedgehog, a porcupine-like animal, was the weather prophet of the day. Later it may have been the badger that saw his shadow on Candlemas Day.

Some say early colonists brought the legend to the New World, and finding no European hedgehogs or badgers thrust the burdensome job on the groundhog, a relative of rabbits, squirrels and guinea pigs. Others say the belief originated with Negroes of the eastern middle states who observed that in mild winters the groundhog may appear in February but will go underground again as soon as cold weather returns.

### Weather Predictor?



Most groundhogs, however, do not begin spring activity until late March or early April. Studies have shown that the hibernating chamber, a nest at the end of a narrow shaft extending four or five feet down and 20 feet long, is coldest during these first few weeks of early spring.

When the groundhog finally emerges in the spring, it has a battered appearance and weighs only slightly more than five pounds, about half as much as when it went into hibernation in the fall. The

animal is hungry, of course, but finding a mate usually is the most important job for the moment. With much whistling and squeaking and an occasional barking sound, mating is achieved.

A month later, two to eight naked, blind, helpless young are born. Their eyes open and the coat develops within a month and they are weaned at five weeks.

In the meantime, adults begin their hunt for food, mostly plants such as alfalfa and clover, but frequently snails, insects, mice or even birds.

By midsummer the nursery has become overcrowded and the mother groundhog chases a few or all of the young from the nest to find or build their own burrows.

Unlike the notorious prairie dogs, who join their underground tunnels to build prairie dog towns, groundhogs are not particularly gregarious. In the fall, each groundhog, then fat and sleepy, will retreat to his own den.

—GLORIA BALL

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