

gadget planet GREEN LANTERN

by William C. Altreuter



ThermaCell Mosquito Repellent Lantern

Some time ago I came to the realization that if I'm using the words "camp" and "fun" together I must be talking about the good, Susan Sontag kind of camp, not the bad, insects-and-no-showers kind. This has worked out pretty well for me: more standing on lawns drinking wine, less scratching and smelling like wood smoke. The problem is that you don't have to be backwoods to be bugged by bugs. Just about my favorite warm-weather thing to do is to come home from work, sit in my backyard with a glass of wine, and read the paper. Ideally I'm joined in this activity by my wife and daughters, but frequently their presence is abbreviated. They slap at their exposed legs and arms, then retreat indoors. We've tried citronella candles and other things to no avail. Fumigating ourselves with insect repellent seems counter-intuitive as well—it's the mosquitoes that should be poisoned, not us, and the smell of citronella, nostalgia notwithstanding, blends poorly with red wine. There are a number of devices on the market that claim to repel biting insects using inaudible ultrasonic sound; these are as ineffective as they are inaudible. The noise mosquitoes make is hateful, and so is the high-pitched whine these gadgets emit.

In the malarial confines of my yard the thing that I've found that actually works is this device, which uses a butane cartridge to heat a strip of cardboard infused with allethrin, a synthetic compound related to whatever it is in chrysanthemums that possesses mosquito-repellant properties. It gets about as hot as a cup of coffee, and there is no open flame, so it's safe, and not likely to attract the sort of people who enjoy playing with candle wax and making a big mess. It is comparatively odorless and silent. The ThermaCell people also make a personal device to hang from your belt loop. It looks a little like Mr. Spock's tricorder and is well suited for those occasions, like walks in the woods, when looking like Diogenes isn't the look you are going for. The personal unit is \$19.99; the lantern is \$32, and a box of replacement strips and butane cartridges is around \$20 at Home Depot.



Harman Kardon SoundSticks II

It seems so long ago now, but music playback systems (our parents called them "hi-fi sets") were once extremely complicated. You'd spend months of research trying to determine what set of components would sound best, and when you had assembled the right pre-amp, amp, speakers, tape deck, and turntable your living room looked like the bridge of the flying saucer from *Lost In Space*. When that was done, you'd repeat the entire process for your car (except for the turntable part).

Back then Harman Kardon was a name that was spoken with deserved reverence. They still deserve the respect. These days a surprising

number of people listen to their music using their computer (or iPod) as their playback device, and this speaker set-up is intended to make that a satisfying aesthetic experience. It works on every level. First off, the transparent plastic housing for the two towers and the subwoofer looks great. More importantly, it sounds like the real deal. The 20-watt subwoofer brings the bass in a good way, adding depth and fullness to the sound. This is not intended as a portable set; although it is smaller than the stereo you had in your dorm room, it is a worthy replacement for it. \$169.95.



Gorillapod

I've decided that I want to become a better photographer. Usually this sort of resolution means that I'm trying to justify buying a better camera, but this time my plan is to take more pictures. Like the monkeys and the typewriters I figure that the odds will favor me producing something great sooner or (probably) later. I reckon I need some sort of technological assistance short of a new camera, so I am working with this, the best portable tripod I've seen. The Gorillapod is a bendy tripod that flexes so that it is secure on uneven surfaces. It wraps around poles or branches and makes steady shots from precarious positions attainable. There's a magnetic version which allows you to cling your camera to sign posts, car doors, and the like, which is what I'm using. \$25 at Best Buy (and elsewhere).

Smart Strip Surge Protector



In Sweden, which has dark like Buffalo has cold, all the time and plenty of it, people go from room to room turning on lights. That's just not the way we were brought up. Our parents went from room to room switching the lights off, and since we all eventually become our parents that's what we do, too. With that kind of upbringing the parsimonious premise of this otherwise mundane appliance was immediately appealing. The Smart Strip is a surge protector that automatically turns off computer peripherals and other electronic equipment that isn't being used. If you have ever walked into a room and glowered at the blinking lights of your PC and its playmates, the appeal of this should be immediately apparent. If it's not, let's let the Smart Strip packaging spell it out for you: "Computer peripherals and home entertainment products can draw 4 to 60+ watts each sitting idle ... Would you leave two, three, or even more 60-watt lamps on 24 hours a day?" Well, would you, punk?

The Smart Strip is a nearly effortless way to reduce your carbon footprint. They claim it will pay for itself, and that seems true, so in a way it is actually free. \$39 from cableorganizer.com.

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