

Making Ripples

DIY Green Inventions

by Amanda Bancroft

The popular claymation series, Wallace & Gromit, used to be just fun entertainment for Ryan & I. But now, it's inspiring us to become resourceful inventors in our spare time. This week, we watched Wallace & Gromit's "World of Invention" series featuring these lovable characters along with real inventions that could use flies to generate electricity, a vacuum to transport a person, CDs and wind to water the garden, and toothbrushes to catch intruders in the pantry (or chicken coop, for example).

For garden enthusiasts, the series contained a DIY special features section great for kids and time-saving for adults. Try out the wind-powered sprinkler made from just CDs and other household items that form a windmill that whips droplets of water around a small garden space. For those who keep losing chickens but don't know why, there's a DIY security camera that uses toothbrushes and a disposable camera rigged in a position to reveal your intruder. The automatic flash might be useful in scaring the animal away from your chickens. To help with heavy lifting or hauling, you could build an "atmospheric railway" from PVC pipe, string, and a shop vac – kids can build it, but it's powerful enough to pull a man on a skateboard a short distance down the road!

The show introduced me to some inventors with skills far greater than my own will ever become, including the creators of fly-eating robots. These robots use microbial life to digest dead flies, using the energy generated and stored during digestion to move across a table or produce electricity. Some use sticky fly paper, others need to be hand-fed flies. To watch a video about how this process works, scan the QR code with your mobile device and visit today's blog post!

During this series, which is available for check-out at the Fayetteville Public Library, I was introduced to several inventors who will be making my off-grid lifestyle much easier. In 1989, Trevor Baylis invented a wind-up radio that works in areas with no electricity – a device we already use. Emily Cummins, an award-winning inventor and 24-yr-old student, had humble beginnings in her garden shed. She created a DIY refrigerator from a plastic basket or bucket, wire mesh, dirt, water, and a sealable food container. This device uses evaporation instead of electricity to cool food, which is great for saving energy off-grid.

While I won't be winning awards anytime soon, it inspired me to consider DIY projects we can implement off-grid. Ryan is excited about a pulley system we can rig to transport and store items between our future loft and the kitchen below. With human ingenuity, it's possible to create just about anything! So do like Wallace says, and "Build, explore, and invent your socks off!"

Ripples is a blog connecting people to resources on sustainable living while chronicling their off-grid journey and supporting the work of non-profit organizations. Read more on this topic and others at www.RipplesBlog.org