



BACKYARD nature center News

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Squirrel-proof By Design

Did you ever stop to think about it? Who is the person that figures out how to keep the squirrels out of your bird feeder? This person must have a very high tolerance for failure and frustration. How do they know what the squirrels might do?

We know that squirrel-proofing is a multimillion dollar industry and that the squirrel proof feeders that really work are the top of the line products in our store. Such items as the Squirrel Buster and the Tipper are popular gift items every holiday season. But have you ever heard someone tell you at a party that they design squirrel-proof bird feeders for a living? Can you imagine some proud mother telling her friends that her son the engineer is the designer of the Flipper?

So, who spends the hours and months of time pitting his or her design expertise against the casual cunning of your basic squirrel? What degrees does this person have? What training must you have in order to pursue the battle against such a wily foe? Do they have some fascinating high-tech squirrel lab with special devices for measuring “Leap-a-bility” and “Chew Quotient?”

To get the answers, we called the presidents of the two top companies in the business, Droll Yankee and Brome Bird Care. Betsy Puckett of Droll functions as “Designer in Chief” and described the familiar process of experienced people trying new things to see if they can come up with something

that will work. No special team of engineers or super secret test and development lab is needed. For example, with the Jagunda Feeder, Betsy and her team started out with two existing products, the tray and the cover, and used cardboard and hardware store parts to mock-up a new feeder. She took the prototype feeder home to test in her own backyard. Betsy noted, however, that the sophistication of her design process was increasing. In their new facilities, now being completed, the company will have its first-ever test lab/machine shop for working on the approximately half dozen new designs in development at any one time.

At Brome Bird Care, Paul Cote, the president, designed the Squirrel Buster in his basement and ended up building a company around his invention. But Paul did not start with bird feeders, as he had previously worked to design footwear and shoe manufacturing technology. He also invented and patented a tool for cleaning his swimming pool. As an inventor and serial entrepreneur,



Paul comes closer to the “mad scientist” model for man vs. squirrel. In his offices there is a small workshop where he can spend time developing and building prototypes of the 7 or 8 new products that he has in development at any one time. He spoke proudly of his prototyping machine that can

take a CAD drawing from his computer and actually carve the part from plastic resin in order to see it and refine it before the manufacturing tooling process.

Finally, Paul noted that much of the innovation is actually not in defeating the squirrel but in the design for manufacturing process. Much of his time is spent refining a design in order to produce it efficiently and make it affordable for all of us to use and enjoy. It turns out that efficient manufacturing is an even larger challenge than defeating the squirrels. Can you believe that?

Just for Laughs

This may not be you or me, but it could be the generation before us. At any rate it's just for Laughs!

Grocery Bag Good One

Checking out at the store, the young cashier suggested to the much older lady that she should bring her own grocery bags, because plastic bags are not good for the environment.

The woman apologized to the young girl and explained, "We didn't have this 'green thing' back in my earlier days."

The young clerk responded, "That's our problem today. Your generation did not care enough to save our environment for future generations."

The older lady said that she was right—our generation didn't have the "green thing" in its day. The older lady went on to explain:

Back then, we returned milk bottles, soda bottles and beer bottles to the store. The store sent them back to the plant to be washed and sterilized and refilled, so it could use the same bottles over and over. So they really were recycled. But we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Grocery stores bagged our groceries in brown paper bags that we reused for numerous things. Most memorable besides household garbage bags was the use of brown paper bags as book covers for our school books. This was to ensure that public property (the books provided for our use by the school) was not defaced by our scribbling's. Then we were able to personalize our books on the brown paper bags. But, too bad we didn't do the "green thing" back then.

We walked up stairs because we didn't have an escalator in every store and office building. We walked to the grocery store and didn't climb into a 300-horsepower machine every time we had to go two blocks.

But she was right. We didn't have the "green thing" in our day.

Back then we washed the baby's diapers because we didn't have the

throw away kind.

We dried clothes on a line, not in an energy-gobbling machine burning up 220 volts.

Wind and solar power really did dry our clothes back in our early days. Kids got hand-me-down clothes from their brothers or sisters, not always brand-new clothing.

But that young lady is right; we didn't have the "green thing" back in our day.

Back then we had one TV, or radio, in the house—not a TV in every room. And the TV had a small screen the size of a handkerchief (remember them?), not a screen the size of the state of Montana. In the kitchen we blended and stirred by hand because we didn't have electric machines to do everything for us. When we packaged a fragile item to send in the mail, we used wadded up old newspapers to cushion it, not Styrofoam or plastic bubble wrap. Back then, we didn't fire up an engine and burn gasoline just to cut the lawn. We used a push mower that ran on human power. We exercised by working so we didn't need to go to a health club to run on treadmills that operate on electricity.

But she's right; we didn't have the "green thing" back then.

We drank from a fountain when we were thirsty instead of using a cup or a plastic bottle every time we had a drink of water. We refilled writing pens with ink instead of buying a new pen, and we replaced the razor blade in a razor instead of throwing



away the whole razor just because the blade got dull. But we didn't have the "green thing" back then. Back then, people took the streetcar or a bus and kids rode their bikes to school or walked instead of turning their moms into a 24-hour taxi

service in the family's \$45,000 SUV or van, which cost what a whole house did before the "green thing." We had one electrical outlet in a room, not an entire bank of sockets to power a dozen appliances. And we didn't need a computerized gadget to receive a signal beamed from satellites 23,000 miles out in space in order to find the nearest burger joint.

But isn't it sad the current generation laments how wasteful we old folks were just because we didn't have the "green thing" back then?



Nick and Cathy Clausen are the owners of the Backyard Nature Center master gardeners, avid backyard bird-watchers

The BACKYARD nature center is your local resource for Alpen binoculars. We offer expert advice while providing you with quality optics.

“The longer I live...
the more beautiful life becomes”

—Frank Lloyd Wright

As I sit on my screened porch enjoying my morning tea, I look around at all the mature foliage on our little one acre of bird and human habitat. Wow... I'm astounded at what has grown up and filled in over the 29 years since we built our home. Cedars, pine trees, currant's and honeysuckles, viburnums, bald cypress, river birch & cottonwoods (yes, with snowy cotton...unfortunately), and burr oaks that tower over our house and keep it so wonderfully cool in the summer. Amazed at all nature has accomplished in that time, Nick reminds me that he planted almost everyone of those trees and bushes and that when we built the house, there were three small cottonwoods on the lot and we intentionally positioned the house to “snuggle” in amongst the trees at an angle, only Nick would have thought of that. What a good man.

Have I lost my mind, or is it just old age creeping up on me, possibly? Now I start to recall that while Nick was planting, I was busy with our three young daughters, running back and forth to school and all that involves. Oh, how easily we forget and how quickly time flies when you're having fun!

In hindsight, what we have built, over the years, is a perfectly lovely place to observe nature, and invite all the beautiful songbirds you could every want to see in Kansas. We are not much for counting, but Nick says our “yard list” is approximately 150 different species. Since we opened our birding and nature store 25 years ago, we have learned from naturalists, biologists, and professional, well-traveled birders, who have written field guides, and studied under our old friend, the late Dr. Aelred Geis. Dr. Geis was a biologist and ornithologist for the Department of Fish and Wildlife in Washington, DC, who's field research was used to create bird feeding preference guides used by the industry. All this knowledge and these influences have brought us to realize that some of the best birding is what you can bring to your own backyard!

They say it's the little things in life that mean the most, like watching the orioles lap up the homemade jelly I put out twice a day, seeing hard working screech owl adults tirelessly flying back and forth to feed the babies in the big nest box high on a pole overlooking the veggie garden, hearing the cardinals and brown thrashers singing before dawn, filling the nectar feeders for the hummers that stay all summer...these are the little joys I can count on, oh and a great husband of almost 40 years to help me enjoy all this lovely habitat (oh...and plant the bushes). Thanks Nick and Happy FATHER'S DAY!



Best New Products!

This summer is all about the hummingbirds!



Make your hummingbird maintenance easier with these two great new products!

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A handy product that keeps your hummingbird nectar fresher longer! This micronutrient mineral is naturally consumed by hummers in their diet. Nectar Defender keeps nectar fresh for weeks instead of days. It works by using a micronutrient that is essential for the natural health of hummingbirds. In addition to being safe, ND is recognized by the FDA and USDA, and it also eliminates the known health risk of consuming spoiled nectar.

Nectar Aid Self Measuring Pitcher

The fastest and easiest way to mix and pour nectar for hummingbirds and orioles. Nectar Aid is a measuring cup, microwave container, mixing spoon, funnel and storage container. You'll never want to mix nectar again without it! Pitcher holds 52 ounces, or 1.6 quarts.



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 Sunday: 12 noon–4 p.m.
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