

# Hero Dad

This holiday season, find a gift that's just as unique as the kid you're giving it to **BY AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN**

The average American kid spends more than six hours a day playing video games and watching TV—and that's during the school year. Pry them away from the small screen with toys that will expand their minds without shrinking your wallet. After all, if we're okay with bequeathing our children a broken planet, we at least owe them the scientific curiosity to turn things around.

## Necking and Cuddling

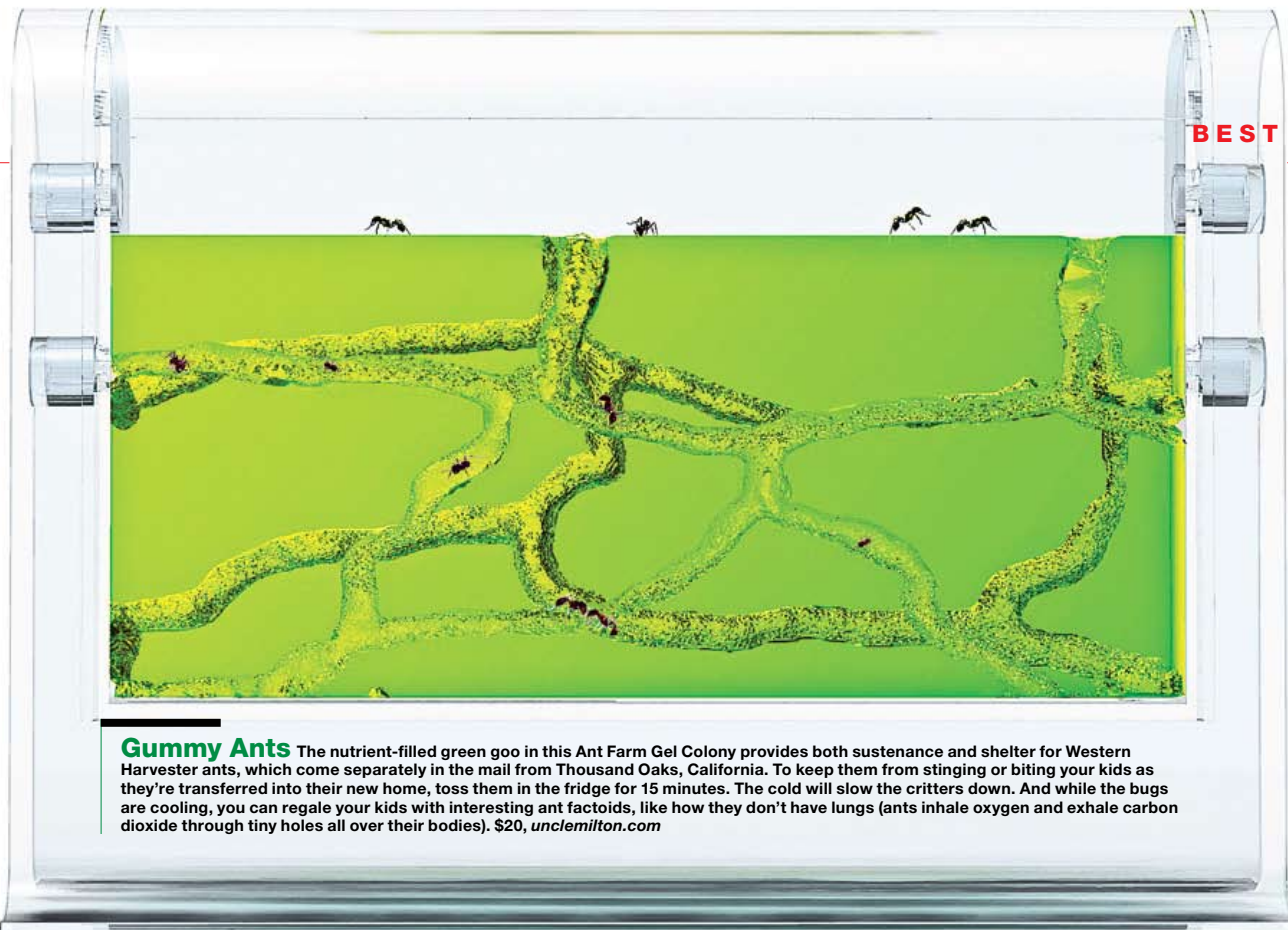
The cuddly Jellycat Juniper Giraffe teaches your child to recognize words like *chirpy bird* and *squeak* because they are stitched directly onto the part of the giraffe that makes that sound or action. The tail can be pulled for a lullaby, and the left back foot has a soft hidden mirror for playing peek-a-boo. And you won't find this plush pal at Wal-Mart: It's made by a company in England, and new animals are added to the line annually, making it perfect for starting a holiday tradition. \$42, [jellycat.com](http://jellycat.com)



**Shutterbug Junior**

Nurture your budding Ansel Adams without worrying about your \$500 camera falling from his little hands. The Kid-Tough Digital Camera features two-eye viewing for easy aiming, a 1.3-inch color LCD preview screen, and auto flash. Help him transfer up to 60 pictures with the included USB cord, and discover what the world looks like from your child's perspective. \$70, [fisherprice.com](http://fisherprice.com)





**Gummy Ants** The nutrient-filled green goo in this Ant Farm Gel Colony provides both sustenance and shelter for Western Harvester ants, which come separately in the mail from Thousand Oaks, California. To keep them from stinging or biting your kids as they're transferred into their new home, toss them in the fridge for 15 minutes. The cold will slow the critters down. And while the bugs are cooling, you can regale your kids with interesting ant factoids, like how they don't have lungs (ants inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide through tiny holes all over their bodies). \$20, [unclemilton.com](http://unclemilton.com)



**Hell on Wheels**

C&N Reproductions' '55 Classic Sidewalk Cruiser is a reproduction of the iconic Chevy from the same year. Adjustable pedals allow it to grow with your child, and the all-steel construction means the car won't break like cheaper imitations made from plastic and aluminum. \$230, [pedalcar.com](http://pedalcar.com)



**Carnivorous Terrarium**

This Carnivorous Creations kit contains seeds for 10 different types of meat-eating plants, including the Venus flytrap, with its snapping jawlike foliage, and the cobra lily, which drowns flies by luring them with a sweet fragrance into tubular leaves with watery bottoms. To feed these monsters, your kids can capture insects in the backyard or share their leftover meatloaf from the dinner table. \$25, [dunecraft.com](http://dunecraft.com)

**And the Nobel Goes to...**

The Smithsonian Institution's MicroChem XM 5000 set allows up to 1,500 experiments, from the relatively simple procedure of separating oil from water, to the more advanced experiment of creating carbon dioxide from calcium hydroxide, sodium bicarbonate, and vinegar. No experiments require an open flame (Mom will like that), and glass beakers have been replaced with durable plastic ones. \$60, [discoverthis.com](http://discoverthis.com)



**Prehistoric Plant**

Like Cubs fans, the Amazing Dinosaur Plant can go without sustenance for 50 years, which is how it has survived as a species since the time of the T. rex. During lean times throughout history, the plant has dried out into a ball and drifted with the wind to another water source. While plastic dinosaurs will only end up attracting dust in a toy bin, this plant actually makes history come alive. \$8, [dunecraft.com](http://dunecraft.com)



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