

Fireflies seem to be vanishing

Do you remember catching fireflies as a child – or watching their dancing lights, mesmerized by the magic of it? If you grew up in the countryside, they were one of the delights of childhood. Did you know that people who live in cities may never have seen one?

Also if you think you don't see as many as you used to, you are probably right.

According to the web site, firefly.org, loss of habitat, light pollution and pesticides appear to take a toll on these amazing creatures.

Closely mowed lawns have replaced the meadows where fireflies thrive. Standing water and marshy areas have been eliminated. Even wooded areas around our homes have been cleared of leaf litter and rotting wood. These are all places the fireflies need.

Also harming them is light pollution. The lights from traffic, streetlights and outdoor lights around our homes are all thought to interfere with fireflies signaling to potential mates.

Pesticides, especially those used on lawns, are a serious problem for fireflies. Some of those "grubs" you are killing may be the larva of fireflies.

Fireflies or lightning bugs are actually nocturnal beetles. There are more than 2,000 different species but only some have the ability to light up – those that live in the western U.S. generally lack this bioluminescent ability.

Each species has a specific pattern of flashing, and some even synchronize their flashing for reasons scientists still speculate about. The Great Smokey Mountains National Park has firefly tours to watch the synchronous lightning bugs in action.

Although the light is thought to be primarily for attracting a mate, it may also be defensive, telling would-be predators that they taste horrible!

And it isn't just the adult who lights up. In some varieties, the larva and even the eggs may glow.



How to invite fireflies into your yard

- Don't be so religious about keeping the lawn closely mowed. Fireflies like longer grass and low growing plants.
- Turn off outdoor, porch and garden lights when you don't need them.
- Skip the chemicals. Even organic controls tend to be toxic to lightning bugs. Many fireflies also feast on grubs, slugs, and other critters you are trying to get rid of. Encouraging fireflies can be a completely natural sort of pest control.
- Plant native trees, shrubs and flowers. They are more likely to be attractive firefly habitat.

Now for some positive news

If you listen to the nightly news, or catch the new shows on the radio or, perhaps worse, read some of the current blogs, you can be forgiven for believing that world is going to hell at an ever accelerating speed.

We face some challenges, but by many measures we are living in the best times man

(continued)



Artist's conception of a fleet of captain-less ships.

If you find driverless cars a daunting idea...

What do you think of a captain-less ship? This is not some wild idea of an overly imaginative science fiction writer. It is a concept that is being actively pursued today. Among those involved are the British engine maker Rolls-Royce and the container ship company Maersk.

According to the Wall Street Journal, a preliminary study completed this year concluded such ships were both feasible and offered potential cost savings.

Positive news...

has known. We have unprecedented access to travel, affordable to most people. We can communicate quickly and easily around the globe. Many of us are finding we can do at least some parts of our work remotely, from home or somewhere on a warm beach.

The assortment of foods has never been wider. Enriched by immigrants from around the world, our supermarkets feature delicacies earlier generations had never seen. We can enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables year round. And this amidst tumbling prices. Just 50 years ago, the average American spent 14% of their income on food – today that number has dropped to 6%.

Vaccination has eliminated the scourge of small pox and made polio rare. It has removed the threat of many childhood diseases and now even of some kinds of cancer.

Most of us can carry one tiny device that communicates with the world, takes pictures, gives us driving directions and weather forecasts, lets us read books, play music and watch movies – and weighs just ounces. This is the stuff of “Star Trek.”

U.S. homicide rates have hit a 51-year low according to the FBI, 4.5 per 100,000. Violent crime is at its lowest rate in nearly four decades. In many ways, life is better than it has ever been.

Media always focuses on the sensational. We are all likely to be happier if we pay less attention to news outlets, with “if it bleeds, it leads,” and more attention to all the progress and good things that are happening every day.

An unmanned ship would sport technology similar to that of advanced combat drones. It would be guided with the aid of infrared detectors, high-resolution cameras and laser sensors to monitor its surroundings.

All this data would be transmitted to command centers where staff would monitor and direct the ships’ movements. Estimates are this could save more than 20% in transportation costs. There would be no cost for an on-board crew and the elimination of equipment to support people would reduce weight and thus increase fuel efficiency.

While autonomous ships may yet be decades in the future, some of the technology is already in use on Baltic ferries. These trials are intended to see whether the sensors including lasers and thermal cameras have a realistic potential to facilitate a safe and effective self driving ship.

Maple Bacon Party Mix

- 2 cups corn Chex
- 2 cups wheat Chex
- 6 strips bacons, cooked extra crispy and chopped
- 4 Tbs. butter, melted
- 4 Tbs. pure maple syrup (don't substitute)
- ¼ to ½ tsp. cayenne (according to your taste)
- 1 to 1 ½ tsp. sea salt (according to your taste)

Combine cereals, peanuts and cayenne in a large microwave safe bowl. In a small bowl, combine butter and maple syrup. Add this to cereal and stir very well. Microwave on high for three minutes, stirring once every minute to prevent scorching. Add bacon and salt. Mix thoroughly and let cool.

For gluten-free, use 6 cups of rice Chex.

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