

Happiness Is a Toy Gun; From the backyard to the cubicle, nothing offers a quick hit of fun like these weapons of leisure

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ABSTRACT

According to the manufacturer, toys that shoot small objects can't use stored energy for safety reasons, so to fire, you pull and release a spring-loaded lever.

FULL TEXT

With summer on the wane, you've no doubt already swung at it, dived into it or jumped off it. But you're missing out if you haven't shot it from a gun. Not an actual weapon, of course. We mean the slew of toy guns that deliver all of the fun of a firearm without the requisite background check.

You likely have favorites from your youth that you want to revisit (like our two retro picks). But don't let nostalgia distract you from some of the latest advances in novelty ammunition, since what you're shooting is just as important as what you shoot it with. These days, you can litter your yard (or office) with everything from marshmallows to colored gel (it's nontoxic and environmentally friendly, according to the company).

And when the weather turns, bring it all indoors. Mad at your spouse? Don't talk it out; shoot it out. A duel with the Vortex Praxis, in particular, can be surprisingly therapeutic. And when the company Foosball table just doesn't cut it anymore, there's only one solution: Take arms.

While there are plenty of battery-operated guns out there, we went with the old-school manual models. In this age when you can do so much with a pinch and a swipe, it's more satisfying to have to work a bit for your fun. Here are five favorites that would be confiscated on school grounds immediately.

Executive Marshmallow Shooter

Clearly, this is why mini marshmallows exist. You can stuff about 25 marshmallows into the barrel and blast them a good 30 feet for rollicking fun of which even the Cleavers would approve. Just know that a precision firearm this is not. Expect a few double fires and the marshmallows to go flying pretty much everywhere—which is the whole point, really. The shooter comes in a range of styles (camouflage, zebra stripes), but the chromed finish of the Executive line is the most refined. \$30,

Nerf Vortex Praxis

This new pump-action shotgun, which hits stores Sept. 10, delivers the Jason Bourne experience and then some. It shoots foam discs—think mini-Frisbees—that fly incredibly far and ricochet hard. Firing off a few rounds makes you feel like you're launching an armada of mini UFOs. The Praxis is also supremely satisfying to handle—jamming in the 10-disc magazine as well as the solid KA-CHUNK sound you get each time you reload never gets old. \$25,



Xploderz XGround Pounder Blaster

With an astounding 100-foot range, the XGround Pounder shoots squishy blue gel balls that break apart on impact. The ammunition looks disturbing, but it's made from a super-absorbent polymer used in agriculture to release water slowly into arid land. They're safe to scatter around your backyard (they end up watering the grass) and won't stain your carpet. Additional ammo comes in a packet of 500 tiny beads that expand when submerged in water. Despite its gun-like shape, the XGround Pounder has no trigger. According to the manufacturer, toys that shoot small objects can't use stored energy for safety reasons, so to fire, you pull and release a spring-loaded lever. Which pretty much makes the XGround Pounder like a supercharged slingshot. Neighbors, beware. \$50,

Nerf Dart Tag Quick 16

What could be more fun than shooting foam darts? Shooting Velcro-tipped foam darts that stick to any fuzzy surface: sweaters, tweed jackets, wool-upholstered cubicle dividers, office chairs. This sub-machine-gun-style toy is a weapon of choice in Nerf Dart Tag competitions (the 2011 World Championship was held last weekend in Orlando; start training for next year). But even the lowly office prankster will appreciate the ability to fire off an entire 16-dart clip in rapid "slam fire" mode: With the trigger pulled, keep cocking the chamber to unleash a glorious hail of darts that whistle as they whiz by. Coworkers will be keeping human resources on speed dial. \$20,

Burp Gun

Forget the technological advances in toy-gun technological over the past half century. This classic from the '50s is still the bomb. No batteries, no springs, no complicated mechanics. Instead, it relies on old-fashioned air pressure to launch a plastic ball up to 20 feet. Each blast is accompanied by a crisp pop—which somehow manages to be both wholesome and mischievous sounding. The ammunition looks like a standard ping-pong ball but is, in fact, slightly smaller. Be sure to buy extra. \$20,

Credit: By Michael Hsu

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