

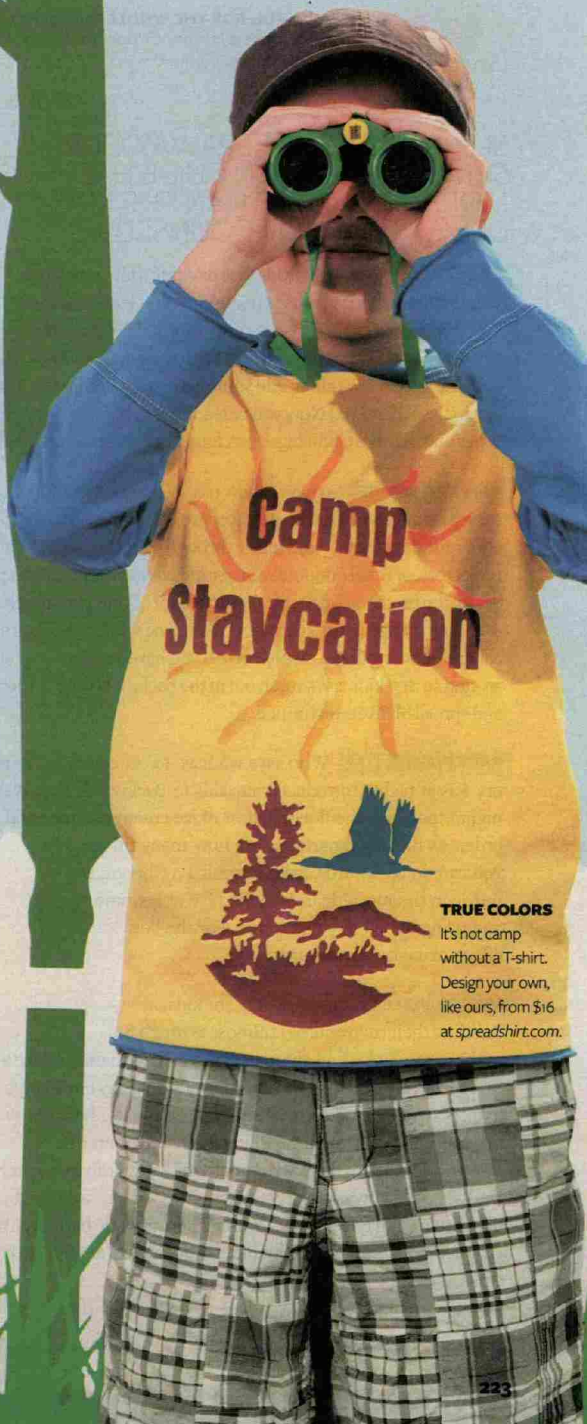
better

FAMILY 223 HEALTH 230

Keeping kids active and entertained all season long is a cinch with BHG's camp-at-home vacation guide.

home rules!

by HOLLY ROBINSON and MAUREEN SHELLY
photos KATHRYN GAMBLE



TRUE COLORS

It's not camp without a T-shirt. Design your own, like ours, from \$16 at spreadshirt.com.

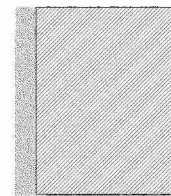


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES; PRODUCED BY JEAN SCHISSEL NORMAN AND MEREDITH LADIK

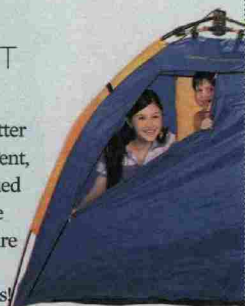
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FAMILY FUN FOR THE WHOLE SUMMER Look for entertaining ideas in July and road-trip tips come August.

SLEEPAWAY, SHMEEPAWAY. OUR SUMMER VACATION GUIDE HAS MORE FUN IDEAS THAN THE MOST DEDICATED CAMP COUNSELOR.

BACKYARD CAMPOUT Kids love pitching a tent no matter where it lands. Set up your own (ours is ABO Gear's InsTent, \$60, campmor.com) or jury-rig a pup using a sheet stretched over a rope tied between two trees, with rocks to hold the corners. If local laws allow, add some fire. (Walmart has fire pits for less than \$50.) Now you're ready to sing campfire songs and play flashlight tag. Don't forget the ghost stories!



DRIVE-IN MOVIE No matter how old you are, outdoor films are a treat. The easiest arrangement is with a laptop, projector, and either PC-powered speakers or an adapter that plays music through your car radio. (Many libraries rent projectors, or retail outlets like atsrentals.com will rent for \$64 plus shipping). Set up the projector on a table or on the roof of your car, stretch a white sheet over your garage doors, then show the movie while the kids are sitting in the car and chowing down on popcorn. If you have a station wagon, turn the car around so that kids can stretch out in the back, or borrow a friend's pickup and spread blankets on the bed.

BACKWARDS DAY Who says we have to eat cereal in the morning and put on our PJs at night? Introduce your kids to Backwards Day. Wake them with "Good night," then give them a breakfast of ice cream and mac and cheese—in that order. As the day progresses, see how many things you can do backwards, from watching a Christmas movie in the morning to taking a hike at bedtime and going to bed in your clothes. For the best effect, make the day a surprise.

MAKE YOUR OWN MINI GOLF For kids, building their own course is almost as much fun as the game. Use whatever materials you have handy. Make a ramp from loose bricks and aluminum siding; lay an old pipe or a roll of wire on its side for a tunnel. Create water hazards by burying plastic buckets and filling them with water. Stick flowerpots in holes marked by sticks with paper flags to catch the balls. (Don't want to dig? Stakes or tipped and weighted plastic cups are fine targets.) Young kids might do better with croquet mallets and balls, but older kids can use regular golf clubs and balls. ▶



RAINY DAY RESCUE

WEATHER OR NOT

Don't get bored—get board. Game, that is. Michigan father Tim Paczesny's outdoor-themed "Camp" (\$25 at rei.com) allows different age groups to compete and learn together. Fun wildlife fact: "A full-grown bear can run as fast as a horse."



FUN FOR FUNDS

A scholarship competition is perfect for the teen set. Get started now for the November deadline of the Veterans of Foreign Wars' audio essay contest; the grand prize is a \$30,000 scholarship (go to vfw.org for more info). For budding moviemakers, Bridgestone Tire's Safety Scholars Video contest (safetyscholars.com) accepts applications through July 1 for three \$5,000 scholarships. Or volunteer: Students who hold blood drives now through August 31 that meet guidelines are eligible for the American Red Cross BloodStock scholarship drawings of up to \$2,000 (redcrossblood.org/scholarships). If none of these suit, find more opportunities at nonprofit sites like collegescholarships.org.
 — JENNIFER SHAW

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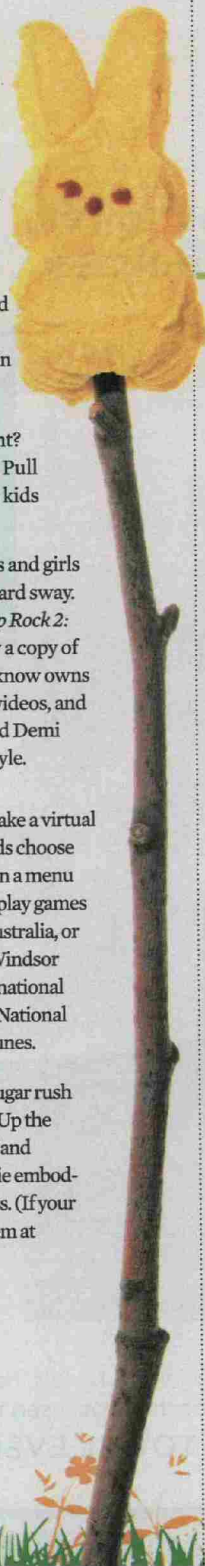
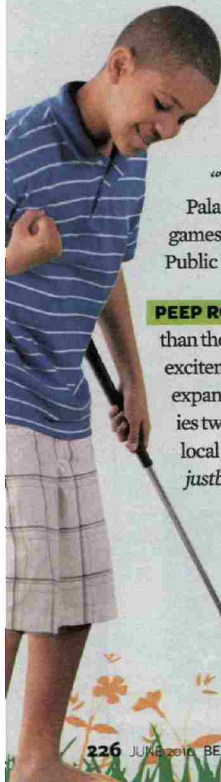
MAKE A YEARBOOK Commemorate summer-camp-at-home: Pick up an album and basic scrapbooking materials from a craft store or bookstore, then add photos and mementos (pressed leaves, Popsicle sticks, Band-Aids). If you've got techy types, have them create the books digitally; scrapbookflair.com offers a range of free downloadable backgrounds, templates, and embellishments. Assign older kids roles like page designer and photographer. Don't forget to leave time for new BFFs to write in each other's albums: "Stay cool, QT! C U @ school."

GAME MASH-UP Everyone wants to play something different? New York City gym instructor John DeMatteo has a solution: Pull out all your sports gear (balls, bats, goals, flags) and challenge kids to invent their own game.

SUMMER DANCE Remember the end-of-summer dance? Boys and girls on opposite sides of the room, hesitantly merging into an awkward sway. Today's tweens have it much better. The hotly anticipated *Camp Rock 2: The Final Jam* debuts on the Disney Channel in August. Borrow a copy of the original Jonas Brothers hit on DVD (trust us, someone you know owns it), and review the special features, which include more songs, videos, and karaoke, as well as dance moves. Then watch your Joe Jonas and Demi Lovato wannabes hit the patio for a dance party, 21st-century style.

PICNIC AROUND THE WORLD Each week, take a virtual field trip to a different foreign country. Let kids choose their countries and do a little research to plan a menu and learn a few native phrases. After lunch, play games like "Down Down Down" if you're going to Australia, or "Tiggy Off Ground" if you're imagining a day at Windsor Palace (see gameskidsplay.net/games for more international games). Don't forget music: Check out the playlists at National Public Radio's World Music online archives for great tunes.

PEEP ROAST Marshmallow roasts are less about the sugar rush than the parent-approved opportunity to play with fire. Up the excitement by serving Peeps, which, when heated, puff and expand in unpredictable ways. The resulting menagerie embodies two kids' fascinations at once: the cute and the gross. (If your local grocery or drugstore is all out of Peeps, order them at justbornstore.com.)



FRAME IT

TIME: 2 HOURS PERFECT FOR: ALL AGES

Get camp-style artsy-craftsy at home. Just buy a plain, inexpensive frame, commune with nature, get creative—and have fun.

CUT-TWIG FRAME

Collect twigs, pinecones, and seed pods. Sand and paint an unfinished flat frame. Using handheld pruners, have an adult cut the twigs slightly longer than the frame-face width. Glue the twigs to the frame with all-purpose crafts glue. Add pinecones or pods to the corners. When glue is dry, paint the decorations the same color as the frame base.



LEAF STENCIL FRAME

Collect small leaves to use as stencils. Sand and paint a flat frame blue; let dry. Coat the backs of the collected leaves with repositionable spray adhesive (follow directions on can). Adhere the leaves to the frame. Spray-paint the frame a different color than the base. Immediately remove the leaves. Add detail with permanent marker.

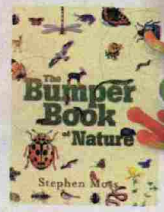
— REBECCA FRENCH



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1. WICKET COOL

Originating back in the 1300s, croquet is a game for the ages—all of them. Kids of any ability level (and, for that matter, adults, too) can easily team up for a sport that—for all its haute origins—is surprisingly democratic. Eddie Bauer croquet set, \$40 at Target.



2. INTO THE WILD

In *The Bumper Book of Nature* (\$30, Harmony Books), Stephen Moss shares fun (and froggy) facts and outdoor activities for every season, whatever your family's natural habitat.

3. ICAMP

The Coleman Lantern utility enables your iPhone or iPod Touch screen to emit strong white light—handy for finding Junior's lost inhaler before bedtime. The Creepy Campfire Tales app suggests age-appropriate stories to read aloud—eerie sound effects included! iTunes, free.



4. GET IN GEAR

Dispatch your explorers to the Outback out back with Backyard Safari Outfitters' binoculars (\$10) and essential cargo vest (\$17). Available at Walmart, Toys "R" Us, amazon.com.



5. CAMPER HAMPER

Lighter than a cooler, more cleanable than traditional picnic baskets, this colorful carryall made from woven plastic raffia is a backyard superstar. \$15, Target.

For buying information see page 252.

PHOTOS: (TREE FROG) VEER; MARKET EDITOR: MAUREEN SHELLY