

## Editor's notes:

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It's not easy being green, as Kermit the Frog once sang, but it's apparently easier to be creative when you've got something green to look at.

In an experiment, psychologists challenged 69 men and women to generate as many different uses as possible for a tin can within two minutes. But right before getting started, half the participants were shown a picture of a white rectangle, and the rest were shown a green rectangle.

Those who saw the green box tended to produce more imaginative ideas, according to the researchers. The findings were replicated in exercises involving different colors versus green.

The psychologists, from Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, Germany, theorize that the colour green triggers thoughts of growth that stimulate the brain to work harder. In any case, try "greening" your thoughts to prompt better ideas.

Speaking of colour, did you know that birds poop more often on a red car than on any other coloured cars? According to a study conducted by Halfords, a British automotive company, birds really do target the red cars most often.

Researchers found that red cars had the highest number of bird droppings at 18 percent. Blue cars were targeted 14 percent of the time; black cars at 11 percent; white at 7 percent; silver at 3 percent and green at 1 percent.

According to the car cleaning experts with the automotive company, "this research does have a serious side because the problem annoys drivers, causes damaged paintwork and affects the value of vehicles." To protect your bodywork from damage, droppings should be carefully cleaned off as soon as possible.

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July was named in 44 B.C. for Julius Caesar, the ruler of Rome. He reorganized the calendar to bring it closer in sync with the seasons, adding 67 days to the year 45 B.C. and introducing 12 months of 30 and 31 days instead of the original 10. The Senate, grateful for his righting the chaotic calendar, named the month after him because it was his birth month.

July also marks the start of the summer season, at least, for school kids and their teachers. During these lazy, hazy days of summer, here are a few dates worth noting:

**Canada Day, July 1** -- Canada was officially created on July 1, 1867, when the vote by Britain's parliament enabled the provinces to unite and form a confederation.

**Independence Day, July 4** -- Let's not forget our neighbour to the south. On this day, the Americans celebrate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 by the original 13 colonies of the United States.

**Dog Days, July 3 - August 15** -- These days are the hottest of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. This 6-week period is named after the Dog Star Sirius, which appears at or just before sunrise during this time.

**International Kissing Day, July 6** -- People who study such things say that two-thirds of us tilt our heads to the right when we kiss, and it has nothing to do with whether one is right- or left-handed. This is the day to test that out.

**Bastille Day, July 14** -- This is a French national holiday and an important day for people of French descent around the world. It marks the day in 1789 when a Parisian crowd stormed the Bastille, a prison fortress where political prisoners were kept, to gather arms and ammunition. All seven prisoners were freed, and the governor was killed.

The Bastille was infamous among Parisians, who recounted horrible tales (somewhat exaggerated) of torture that took place behind the fortress walls. But the Bastille also guarded one of the gates to the city, so it held considerable strategic importance for the revolutionaries.

The attack marked the beginning of the French Revolution.

**Moon Day, July 20** -- Celebrating the first landing of human beings on the moon in 1969. "That's one small step for (a) man . . ."

**Rat-Catchers Day, July 22** -- On this date in 1376, legend has it that the Pied Piper struck a deal to rid the town of Hamelin, Germany, of its rats. Charmed by his flute playing, the rats followed him to the river. When the town refused to pay him, the Piper played again and this time the children followed him out of the town, never to be seen again. Hamelin recreates this story every Sunday at noon during the summer.

### Quotable Quotes:

The wishbone will never replace the backbone.

-- Will Henry

As long as you're going to be thinking anyway, think big.

-- Donald Trump

Beware the barrenness of a busy life. -- Socrates

## Where Music Lives in Your Brain

Scientists think they've located the area in our brains that allows us to remember exactly where we were, who we were with, and what kind of sandwich we were eating when we first heard "My Sharona" by The Knack. It turns out that the region of the brain that supports and retrieves memory also functions as a hub for music, memory, and emotion.

Psychologist Petr Janata, a professor at UC Davis' Center for Mind and Brain, performed functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) on 13 students, recording brain activity while his subjects listened to random songs from Top 100 charts. The more vividly the students remembered the songs, the more brain activity the fMRI recorded in the upper section of their medial pre-frontal cortex.

Musicians' brains have their own secrets to tell, though: Psychologists at Vanderbilt University report that musicians use both the left and right sides of their frontal cortex more than most people, possibly because many musicians need to learn how to move both hands independently in order to play their instruments.

In one test, musicians and non-musicians had their brains monitored with a technique called NIRS, for near-infrared spectroscopy. Both groups were asked to come up with new uses for common everyday objects while the NIRS measured changes in blood oxygenation. The musicians showed more activity in both sides of their frontal lobes, leading the scientists to suggest a qualitative difference in how their brains handled the task.

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### How to 'steal' ideas like a pro

"Immature poets imitate," wrote poet T.S. Eliot; "mature poets steal." The path to success isn't always based on coming up with your own unique ideas. Sometimes the best route is to follow someone else's approach. From the book *Steal Like an Artist*, by Austin Kleon, here's how to harvest good ideas from the sources around you:

- **Pick a handful of thinkers to emulate.** Instead of trying to immerse yourself in an entire subject, select two or three representatives to study at a time. The effort will be less daunting, and you'll get a good view of the issues and ideas swirling around the topic. Find out where they're coming from and how they see the world, and use that to inform your perceptions.

- **Change the scenery.** Don't just sit at your computer when you're trying to generate ideas. Get out into the world: Move around, observe your surrounding, record your impressions without worrying about how logical they may be, and then spend some time assembling your thoughts around the experiences you've collected.

- **Widen your perspective.** Avoid taking a narrow focus in your work -- or your life. Explore different interests and passions. Most of the time your various activities will complement each other, and you'll be able to use what you learned in one area on a different project. Keep your eyes and your mind open to the resources around you.

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### Beach Facts

Thinking of going down to the beach this summer? There's more to the beach than just sand and surf. Consider the following:

- ✓ When you're at the edge of the ocean, the horizon is about three miles away.
- ✓ High waves carry sand out toward the ocean; small waves deposit sand onto the beach.
- ✓ Every third or every seventh wave is larger than those immediately preceding it.
- ✓ Sand is shell and rock that have been worn down into grains.
- ✓ An average beach pail, roughly a quart, holds 3.5 million grains of sand.
- ✓ Some sandy beaches are famous for the unusual sounds they emit, such as singing, whispering, and even barking. The sounds are believed to be caused by wind passing over the unique composition of the sand and underlying bedrock.

# Have a Great Summer!