

Home&Garden

NUMBER TO KNOW

Rubles (\$2,466) that a suburban Moscow resident is receiving from the government in compensation after a rocket hit his house, according to news reports. No one was in the home at the time of the accident, in which two small rockets veered off course.

60,000

Quick tip >>> The best way to clean screens is to scrub them with a bristle brush, then vacuum them with various attachments.



JIM HILLIBISH

Wireless farm technology coming soon

I've seen the garden of the future, and one thing sticks in my mind: I'm not certain I'm ready for e-mail from my zucchini.

Farmers are leading the way in the computerization of growing stuff. They're using wireless sensors in the field to keep a real-time eye on what's happening.

The sensors monitor moisture, fertility and other important stuff. They send the results to a computer, which then alerts the farmer via e-mail. Or, the user may call up a database containing the sensor results for the entire farm.

Today's smart farms are wireless, so Mr. Farmer can check on his crops anytime and without leaving his house, barn, tractor, wherever he has his laptop.

The data is accurate, timely and to the point such as "NW field corn needs water within 12 hours."

This gear replaces the guesswork of walking around fields each day and trying to figure out what's happening. It's especially valuable when making fertilizer and soil pH corrections on the fly.

When sensor data is merged in software, it can estimate yields as plants emerge and make suggestions to maximize harvests.

There's a much bigger market out there for this technology. Imagine the possibilities if you could set it up in your own landscape.

The watering part is the toughest. We almost never get the perfect rainfall amount. A sensor could prove to be a money saver. Ditto fertility. Presently, we must send soil samples to labs to determine pH and nutrient levels. You pay your money and you wait. Fertility of soil, as with water, changes constantly. A sensor should help you plan for the most effective application rates and how much to spread.

You're thinking perhaps this is more gee whiz than useful, but it soon could become even more important. We're going to be asked to use less fertilizer to cut back on stream pollution from run off. And in times of drought, watering bans directly affect our landscapes.

The sensors would help to maximize our use of growing resources. They answer a lot of questions accurately that we presently must guess at.

Plus, it's another way to get value from your computer that will pay off in saved money and better yards.

Send gardening questions to jim.hillibish@cantonrep.com

Evolving artistry

Artist uses her talents to add whimsy and interest to home



TOP: A bronze sculpture by Peorian Pat Keck rests on the kitchen table next to the worn thermos carried by plasterer Denny Graff in the Pekin home he shares with his artist wife, Mariam Graff. ABOVE: The foyer offers an immediate message about the home beyond. PHOTOS BY DAVID ZALAZNIK/GHNS

CLARE HOWARD
GateHouse News Service

PEKIN, Ill. - Thousands of people see Mariam Graff's street murals every day. The whimsical style of her public tableaux, with ironic insight and layers of meaning, echoes in her private environment as well, with one notable shift in accent.

At home, the loudest articulation is a passionate, soulful respect that honors individual creativity, acknowledges vulnerability and welcomes visitors to a unique world ... sometimes painful, sometimes playful, always accepting.

Her home reflects a search for meaning. Honesty, not pretense, is the imperative.

"This house isn't about taste at all. It's about comfort No. 1 and about irony," Graff said. "It's an oddball house with a sense of humor. People who are very uptight can let loose in this house."

The artist and her husband, Denny, live in a 100-year old, 1 1/2-story wood frame home in a work-

ing-class neighborhood of Pekin. The house had been repossessed by the bank when the Graffs found it. They worked on it for a year before moving in.

"This house is vintage gray shingles on the outside. I like the incognito-ness of it. This house doesn't look like anything subversive or creative is going on inside," Mariam Graff said.

The inside foyer greets visitors with an immediate, welcoming proclamation: You are about to begin an artful, quirky trip.

The foyer is painted in a muted Chinese red with a Middle Eastern rug, Louis XV chair and pop art chest of drawers decorated with plastic jewels and baubles. Black velvet drapes hang in the doorway of the foyer. Inside, the dining room doubles as a studio.

The rooms in Graff's home have high ceilings and large windows. The kitchen walls are painted soft

orange. Kitchen cabinets are decoupage with figures in historic Mardi Gras costumes.

The living room is often referred to by guests as "the red room," even though it's not painted red. A vibrant Iraqi rug accounts for the room's nurturing red ambience.

Graff does not think in terms of color but in terms of effect and processes.

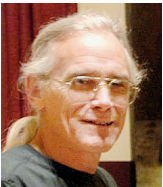
"Everything here is touched, created by someone. Another human being put some of their soul into these things," she said. "This house is not the classic American dream thing. It's oddball."

"This house will never be done. Artists are never totally happy with something. Our lives are about processes, and visually we're always seeking improvement. We love a blank canvas."

Clare Howard can be reached at choward@pjstar.com.



Mariam Graff



Denny Graff

Home Help

KITCHEN CLUTTER

Bag your clutter

Over the next few weeks, we'll give you some tips on how to de-clutter your kitchen, courtesy of HGTV.com.

Get a handle on excess plastic grocery or shopping bags with an inexpensive bag holder. Available as cabinet mounted or freestanding units, these holders contain bags while making them easy to access. Place the plastic bag holder next to the garbage can for extra convenience. When the holder becomes full, recycle the whole bunch.

COMING SOON

Pet Portal



CLASSY CUSTOM

Dog or cat doors generally aren't the most attractive things in a home, so if you want to jazz up the entrance, check out Classy Custom's "pet portals." The doggy doors come with colorful decorative frames — in green, pink, white or yellow — or are available in artsy looks (floral, seasonal themes, etc.). And you can get a matching doormat! For more information, go to www.classycustom.com.

CREATURE COMFORTS

Pet accidents

If your dog has an accident, blot up as much moisture as possible. Rub the spot with a solution of vinegar or lemon juice and warm sudsy water. Blot a few times, then pour straight club soda over the spot and blot again. Place a dry towel over the stain and put a heavy object (like a book) on top of it. Replace towel if it becomes soggy and repeat blotting. For cat accidents, follow the same steps but, when the spot is dry, rub with a cloth dampened in ammonia. This will take the offensive odor away, and it will prevent the cat from ever going in that spot again.

-- www.bostonapartments.com/pettips.htm

GO GREEN

Re-use water

A tip from Treehugger.com on how to go green at home:

Water that has been used at least once but is still clean enough for other jobs is called greywater. Water from sinks, showers, dishwashers, and clothes washers are the most common household examples. Greywater can be recycled with practical plumbing systems like the Aqus, or with simple practices such as emptying the fish tank in the garden instead of the sink.

HOW TO

Keep pipes from freezing



When you are having extremely cold weather, let a little water run through faucets near exposed pipes. That can help keep pipes from freezing. You can also use insulation and electrical heating cable on exposed pipes. If you have frozen pipes, heat the pipes with a heat gun, a hair dryer or a heat lamp. Open a faucet and then work from the open faucet toward the frozen zone.

-- Rockford Register Star

GARDEN Q&A

How do I get my African violets to bloom again?

Q: A few months ago I purchased a purple African violet with an abundance of blooms. It lost its blooms within a few weeks, and shows no signs of reblooming. The leaves seem healthy -- how can I get it to bloom again?



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A: African violets require care that is quite different from most houseplants. It sounds silly, but if you know what NOT to do to an African violet, you will grow abundantly blooming plants quite easily.

Don't place them in direct sunlight or in dark areas.

Don't subject them to temperature extremes.

Don't get water on the leaves.

Don't use cold water to water them.

Don't use any container other than a cheap 4-inch plastic pot.

Don't use peat moss.

Don't leave dead flowers or leaves on the plant.

Don't forget to fertilize.

-- Rockford Register Star