

## Props to Pop: Try one of these gifts for Father's Day

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By Virginia Linn, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Electronics are among the most popular items purchased for Father's Day gifts, and this year will be no exception. In all, the National Retail Federation expects consumers to spend \$9.9 billion on gifts for the June 17 holiday. The average person will spend \$98.34, up from \$88 last year.

Here are some suggestions for that truly great gift for the dad who's impossible to buy for.

### Mow while sleeping

"At first it was infatuation ... now it's true love."

Those were one fellow's comments on [Epinion.com](http://Epinion.com) in describing what might be the ultimate gift for Father's Day: the robotic mower.

Different brands of "mowbots" have been on the market for a while, but better versions are continually being introduced.

We've written about an early version of the Friendly Robotics mower and the now-discontinued Toro iMow, both of which were tested by our staff.

Also on the market is Husqvarna Automower; the latest "improved" version was introduced to the United States by this Swedish company in 2006.

Robotic mowers are designed to move within low-voltage wires placed around the perimeter of the yard and around objects, such as trees.

The automower doesn't include the heavy battery pack as other mowbots do, so it weighs only 19 pounds. It covers up to a half-acre yard and can be programmed to mow continuously (even in rain and wind). The cutting height also can be programmed (between 3/4 of an inch and 2 1/2 inches), and it crisscrosses the yard until all areas are cut.

One of the best features of this and the current version of the Friendly Robotics RoboMower: When they're low on batteries, they miraculously find their way back to the charging stations and plug themselves in. When charged, they head out again to mow.

Mowbots are much quieter than conventional mowers, and charging stations consume \$12 to \$25 in electricity per year, depending on the size of the lawn. Newer models are better on inclines than earlier versions (a must with Pittsburgh's topography). The fine grass cuttings are redistributed to the ground as fertilizer.

And in the event jealous neighbors decide to "borrow" your robotic mower, it has a theft protection system; it cannot be used without the PIN code.



**The Husqvarna Automower (\$2,295.95) lets a robot cut the grass.**  
Click photo for larger image.

The Husqvarna Automower retails at \$2,295.95. It's available at [www.robotsandrelax.com](http://www.robotsandrelax.com) or order through Krigger & Co. in West Deer (1-800-252-8873); the Friendly Robotics RoboMower is available at a variety of outlets (it sells for \$1,699.99 at Costco or \$1,999 at Target, for example). And for that big lawn -- up to 5 acres -- there's BIGMOW, \$12,799 at [robotsandrelax.com](http://robotsandrelax.com).



### Housekeeping made easy

Dad does dinner. Dad tackles mildew and soap scum. Dad loads the dishwasher the aerodynamic way. Dad learns what all those vacuum parts are for.

The instructions are all in "Dad's Own Housekeeping Book" by David Bowers (Workman, \$10.95) and include everything that dad's mom didn't tell him. Why didn't someone write this book before?

And if dad balks about chipping in to do the housework, the book even includes a guide on how much the kids can help. Example: If your child is 2 or 3, he can put toys back in the low toy box and put dirty clothes in the hamper, help feed pets and help make his own bed.

Actually, maybe this would have made a better Mother's Day gift.



Also available is "Dad's Own Cookbook" by Bob Sloan (Workman, \$13.95).

### Where's my remote?

Nothing could be worse for the remote control-addicted dad than if he's misplaced the remote under the newspapers or popcorn bowl. The Voice-Command Universal Remote Control by Hammacher Schlemmer solves that problem. It operates the TV, VCR, DVR, DVD, cable and satellite by the sound of a voice. Requires AAA batteries. Call 1-800-321-1484 or go to [Hammacher.com](http://Hammacher.com) (\$49.95).

### Office on the move

For the dad on the go, there's the Mobile Office by Red Envelope. The kit can be strapped into the passenger side of the car and includes a detachable flip-out writing desk, removable accordion file and mini portfolio. Various pockets can store scissors, calculators and other materials. Call 1-877-733-3683 or go to [Redenvelope.com](http://Redenvelope.com) (\$58).

### Real dads do change diapers

Ditch those frilly pastel-colored diaper bags. Try the Diaper Dude Bag, which easily disguises its true purpose with its messenger-bag style in gray, navy, black or camouflage. Includes padded strap, interior compartments and numerous exterior clips and pockets. Also from Red Envelope (\$52).

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