

The best new toys

An expert's choice for top picks for the holidays

JUST IN TIME for Christmas, Claire Green of Parents' Choice Foundation, a non-profit guide to quality children's media and toys, offers some of 2010's best toys, guaranteed to captivate the imagination and propel playful learning — for a variety of age ranges and budgets. (For more information, visit parents-choice.org.)

My Take Along Farm (\$54.99) and My Take Along Puppet Theater (ages 4+, \$49.99, Playmobil; batteries required).

Self-contained and ready to go, these play sets are the essence of fun and learning.

Farm animals include a pig with piglets and rabbits with a cage.

The puppet theater comes with figures, backdrops, even sound effects with music, applause and laughter (2 x 1.5 V-AAA batteries required for sound).

Recycled Cardboard Dollhouse (ages 4+, \$29.99, Creativity for Kids).

Markers, stickers, furniture and more let little ones do the decorating. Even the box itself becomes part of the house.

Spy Video TRAKR (ages 8+, \$129.95, ShopWildPlanet.com). This first-ever programmable remote-controlled vehicle digitally transmits color video, audio and data, comes pre-loaded with programs that let you see in the dark (Night Vision), memorize and retrace mission routes (Path Mapper) and have robotically enhanced vision (Cyborg Vision). Go online to post and trade your favorite apps and program the TRAKR to do exactly what you want it to do.

Leapster Explorer (ages 4-9, \$69.99, Leapfrog.com). This durable handheld device delivers age-appropriate games, videos and e-books. The display is clear, the interface is child-friendly and the learning is fun. One free downloadable game and USB are included. The Leapfrog library offers a growing list of games, apps, a camera/video recorder and more.

Spinaroos (ages 3+, \$29.49, Target). If a style can be termed retro and futuristic, these colorful and whimsical construction elements are it. This 75-piece up-to-the-minute version of Bristle blocks has faces and quirky shapes that add personality, and bases that twist add movement. The pieces are easy to connect and manipulate.

The Baby Chimp and Polar Bear Cub (ages 5+, \$19.99, Folkmanis.com).

Two lovable and realistic-looking puppets will never be put on the playroom's endangered species list. 

