

Summer's Hottest Toys

Toys that are perfect for gift-giving

Kirsten Flournoy

Thanks to the efforts of San Diego County parents, teachers and children, *Family Magazine* brings you our kid-tested reviews of the newest toys and games. Both adult and junior testers rated the toys based on age-appropriateness, creativity, education, ease of assembly, easy-to-understand instructions, price and most of all – the fun factor. Of the nearly 60 toys we sent out for review, here are the top-scoring hits.

		Description	Surprises	Parents Should Know	What the Kids Liked
	<p>Go Baby Go! Bat & Wobble Penguin 6 months + \$14.99 Fisher-price.com</p>	<p>Inflatable penguin plays fun tunes and silly sound effects.</p>	<p>“Super cute toy and fun for all!” <i>Tamera, mom</i></p>	<p>Well made toy.</p>	<p>7-month-old Chloe loved the penguin’s funny noises. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Discovery & Play Stackers 9 months + \$9.99 Babyeinstein.com</p>	<p>Colorful nesting blocks are perfect for sorting and stacking, building up and knocking down.</p>	<p>“Even my 6 and 4 year olds love to use the blocks.” <i>Jaime, mom</i></p>	<p>Great for all children older than 9 months.</p>	<p>Score: 10</p>
	<p>Baby Spring Float 9-24 Months \$19.99 Swimways.com</p>	<p>Fun pool float includes an adjustable, removable canopy and carrying bag. Squirting puffer fish, teether and toys attached.</p>	<p>Bright colors, fun toys and sun shade make this float a great toy for the pool.</p>	<p>Float is well put together.</p>	<p>Big smiles and excitement from Dylan, 13 months. Score: 9</p>
	<p>Chicco's Talking Garden Activity Table 12 months + \$69.99 Chiccousa.com</p>	<p>Interactive activity table teaches colors, numbers, shapes and more in both English and Spanish.</p>	<p>Exciting sound effects and activities boost learning and hand-eye coordination.</p>	<p>Detachable legs make storage a breeze.</p>	<p>1-year-old Tucker loved the music and sparkling lights. Score: 9</p>

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	<p>IPlay My First Message Center 18 months + \$29.99 Intplay.com.com</p>	“Talking” message center lets toddlers answer the phone and take messages.	Batteries included.	“Toddlers love to chew on the string.” – <i>Christine, mom</i>	Jordan, 20 months, loves hearing recorded messages from mom and dad. Score: 10
	<p>Beginnings TaDoodles Washable Easy Stampers 18 months + \$5.99 Crayola.com</p>	Capless, egg-shaped animal stamps are just the right size for small hands to hold.	No stamp pad required. After lots of use, there’s still plenty of ink left.	Mom Amy “loves” the washable ink. “Young kids stamp everywhere.”	“Me, me, me!” – <i>Jack, 2</i> Score: 10
	<p>Little Miss Flyer My 1st Scooter 2-5 years \$49.99 Radioflyer.com</p>	Zippy pink scooter has three-wheels for extra stability. Available in pink floral and classic red designs.	Easy to ride.	“Better for kids older than 2.” – <i>Jony, mom</i>	“This is cool!” – <i>Maraya, 2</i> Score: 10
	<p>Zinkotek Building System 3 years + \$350.00 Zinkotek.com</p>	Made of EVA foam, the sturdy and brightly colored Zinkotek building system lets kids use their imaginations to create anything they like.	Durable blocks and easy-to-follow instructions. Pricy for families but perfect for schools or daycare centers.	“Made from recyclable material. Large heavy pieces are hard to store.” – <i>Susan, mom</i>	12-year-old Alyssa loved the house she built so much that she spent the night in it. Score: 9
	<p>Baby Alive Newborn 3 years + \$14.99 Hasbrotoyshop.com</p>	Baby Alive Sip ‘n Snooze closes her eyes and goes to sleep after she’s had her bottle.	The bottle is attached so kids won’t lose it.	“Simple baby doll opens and closes her eyes when the bottle is placed in her mouth. Great toy!” – <i>Suzanne, mom</i>	“Mama, I love my new baby doll. Shh, it’s time for her to nap.” – <i>Annika, 3</i> Score: 10
	<p>Vision Quest 3 years + \$26.99 Imagiplay.com</p>	Hand-painted, environmentally-friendly hardwood set inspires imaginative play.	“Well made and good quality. I like that they all fit inside the tipi for storage.” – <i>Tad, dad</i>	Educational “toys with integrity” are great teaching tools for curious minds.	3-year-old Oliver had fun learning about tipis. Score: 9

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	<p>Little Tikes Dirt Diggers 3 years + \$14.99 Littletikes.com</p>	Sturdy yellow construction vehicles have a removable sand tool. Dump truck, bulldozer and excavator available.	Easy set-up.	No small parts. Good for small children.	<p>"Vroom vroom. I have a tractor!" – Noah, 2</p> <p>Score: 10</p>
	<p>Tot-a-Doodledo Crafty Kids Craft Kits 3-7 years \$19.95 Totadoodledo.com</p>	Portable kit comes with a fun craft and 30 minute DVD with six interactive and educational segments. Transportation, School and Animals.	Samantha, age 6, enjoyed using the scissors and glue.	Kit only includes enough supplies for two projects. You will need to provide extras. – Jaimey, mom	<p>"I like my sheep mask!" – Samantha</p> <p>Score: 9.5</p>
	<p>My Bag and Me Children's Book 3-9 years \$10.95 Pentonoverseas.com</p>	"Green power for kids" bag & book set teach environmental responsibility.	Reusable tote bag promotes conservation.	"It was a good story and a cute, usable bag packages within the book." – Francine, mom	<p>"It helps you learn to save the environment." – Evan, 8</p> <p>Score: 10</p>
	<p>Superset Ice Cream Parlor 4 years + \$25.99 Playmobil.com</p>	Playmobil ice cream parlor playset includes three figures, accessories, a patio and bike rack.	Lots of fun. Very interactive.	Some small pieces.	<p>Mandy, age 4, made her mom promise to play ice cream parlor first thing in the morning.</p> <p>Score: 9</p>
	<p>PowerWing 5 years + \$129.99 1-4 players Razorusa.com</p>	Radical three-wheeler offers excellent maneuverability, side-drifting and spin outs.	Scooter is fast but easy to use. Just move your body from side to side. Brakes on the rear wheel.	"Wear a helmet. Scooter can tip sideways." – Francine, mom	<p>"This scooter is cool!" – Evan, 8</p> <p>Score: 10.5</p>
	<p>Super Soaker Bottle Shot 5 years + \$7.99 Hasbro.com/supersoaker</p>	Fill a clean water bottle and pop it into the universal connection for "awesome hydro-powered performance."	Use any water bottle-bigger is better. You will get wet!	"Cole, age 6, could easily fill the water bottle and pump the super soaker by himself." – Anne, mom	<p>"Wow, it doesn't leak." – Cole, 6</p> <p>Score: 10</p>

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	<p>Martian Matter Alien Maker 5 years + \$17.99 Hasbrotoyshop.com</p>	<p>Pack alien molds with ooey-goopy martian mud and lunar lava gel to create cool outerspace creatures.</p>	<p>No heat required. Fun for girls and boys.</p>	<p>Limited amount of lunar lava, but refills are available. Make your own monsters over and over again.</p>	<p>"This is a great toy!" – Sydney, 5 Score: 10</p>
	<p>Speed Racer the Next Generation: The Beginning 6-14 Years \$19.98 Lionsgateshop.com</p>	<p>An update on the classic, Speed Racer The Next Generation Movie is a companion to the theatrical film and new TV series on Nicktoons.</p>	<p>DVD contains a game, the history of Speed Racer and 'making of' features.</p>	<p>It's fun to revisit the characters you remember from childhood.</p>	<p>Loved the game and characters. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Blue Moo All Ages \$16.95 Workman.com</p>	<p>Return to the 50s with this collection of kid-friendly tunes by B.B. King, Sha Na Na, Davy Jones (of the Monkees) and many more.</p>	<p>Song lyrics were funny and easy to follow using the book. Great music.</p>	<p>"You're gonna love it!" – Lisa, mom</p>	<p>"Really fun songs. It was awesome!" – Naomi, 6 Score: 10</p>
	<p>Suite Life of Zack & Cody Tipton Challenge Game 7 years + \$17.00 Store.pressmantoy.com</p>	<p>Zack & Cody fans will love racing to collect Cool Points and School Points while avoiding Mr. Moseby.</p>		<p>Best for kids who are already familiar with the characters and settings.</p>	<p>8-year-old Allie likes playing this cool game with parents and friends. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Roll-It Tic Tac Toe 7 years + \$15.99 Patchproducts.com</p>	<p>Created by a teacher, this game helps students practice addition skills and problem-solving.</p>		<p>What a great idea! – Sue, mom</p>	<p>9-year-old Brandy loves to paint and enjoyed her "cool and beautiful" bag. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Dueling Racers 7 years + \$19.99 Knex.com</p>	<p>Build your own motorized race cars using K'NEX rods, connectors and bricks.</p>	<p>One plastic part broke during assembly, one motor not properly connected.</p>	<p>Kids can put together these neat dragsters all by themselves.</p>	<p>7-year-old Ryan says everything about these cars is good. Score: 9</p>

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	<p>Lego Beach House 8 years + \$29.99 Lego.com</p>	<p>Lego weekend retreat converts into a cafe or tri-level brownstone. Includes barbecue, patio, satellite, flowers and windows.</p>	<p>We liked being able to change the design of the house and use it with other Legos.</p>	<p>It is sometimes difficult to find the small parts. – <i>Melodi, mom</i></p>	<p>Lucas, age 10, couldn't wait to see the finished product. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Cluzzle 8 Years + \$29.99 Northstargames.com</p>	<p>Sculpt your way to winning this wacky guessing game.</p>	<p>“Comes with it's own clay. Games are short, about 15 mins, so you can play a lot or a little.” – <i>Maddy, mom</i></p>	<p>Play on a nonstick or glass surface.</p>	<p>Creativity, sculpting forms by hand. Each game is different. Score: 10</p>
	<p>Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader Handheld Game 8 years + \$9.99 Technosourceusa.com</p>	<p>Take the fun TV show with you anywhere with this single player, portable electronic game.</p>	<p>Challenging, educational and entertaining.</p>	<p>The pencil is sharp, may get lost easily. – <i>Cindy, mom</i></p>	<p>“I won't stop until I win a million dollars!” – <i>Katherine, 11</i> Score: 9</p>
	<p>Hannah Montana Mall Madness 9 years + \$14.95 Hasbrotoyshop.com</p>	<p>Claim the title of “shopping queen” in this electronic, talking game featuring popular character Hannah Montana.</p>	<p>“Game is really fun! Even my 6-year-old could play!” – <i>Cindy, mom</i></p>	<p>Batteries not included.</p>	<p>9-year-old Delaney liked planning ahead and learning about money. Score: 9</p>
	<p>Decorative Ear Buds All Ages \$29.99 Thingsremembered.com</p>	<p>Clip on ear buds give kids (and grown-ups) style and flair.</p>	<p>Decorated with crystals, and personalized with your name. Good sound quality.</p>	<p>Great gift for hard-to-shop-for teens and preteens. – <i>Susan, mom</i></p>	<p>“Love my name on my ear buds. No one will take them.” – <i>Alyssa, 12</i> Score: 10</p>

Kirsten Flournoy is the editor of San Diego Family Magazine. A special thank you to our art director Susan Bergeson for coordinating the toys for this review. Many thanks to the families who generously took the time to participate in our review. We appreciate your help. Editor's note: Items submitted by toy manufacturers to be reviewed for our Toy & Gift Reviews are donated to local charities. Toys submitted for our summer toy review will be donated to: Arc of San Diego County, Father Joe's Village, Neighborhood House Association/Head Start and Ronald McDonald House of San Diego. For a complete list of past recipients or to find out how to submit a children's charity to be considered for a future donation, please visit www.sandiegofamily.com/pages/promotions.html.