

## [New Christmas presents](#) [1]

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While Dr Eamonn Butler has been giving his take on the traditional presents for the twelve days of Christmas, Wired magazine and website has been looking at less traditional things. Alexis Madrigal has [produced](#) [3] a list of the top ten new organisms of 2007. That's right, the best among organisms that didn't exist in 2006. Interestingly, only the 5 gold rings of the twelve days of Christmas list are inert. The rest, ranging from lords a-leaping to that partridge in its pear tree, are living organisms, though many of them these days are rather less useful than the new ones given Wired's accolade.

Wired picks out the Ashera GD hypoallergenic cat, modified so even those allergic to cats are relaxed in its company. This little kitty is not cheap at \$27,000, but the price will come down and pretty soon we'll be able to choose the hypoallergenic option in our regular moggies.

The E-coli modified to make butanol fuel are not very efficient, but it could be a first step, and they were made by students at Atlanta U. While the students were turning bugs into fuel, a U of Central Florida team modified lettuce to produce insulin, and a Penn State team created GM mushrooms that can mass-produce vaccines.

Less cuddly than the hypoallergenic cat, though no less useful, is the South Korean cat modified to glow in the dark under UV light. The fluorescence can act as a marker to show that other modifications have worked. Doctors at Temple U also achieved glowing results with a yeast which glows green in the presence of DNT, found in TNT. This could lead to low-cost and rapid bio-sensors for dangerous materials.

The two that I liked best were the Oak Ridge trees we already reported on, the ones modified to absorb super quantities of CO<sub>2</sub>, and the Clostridium bacteria modified by Netherlands scientists to carry cancer-fighting proteins to oxygen-starved parts of cancer tumours, giving us a "seek and destroy" capability.

What's encouraging is that these are simply the best of a huge list. New organisms to serve our purposes and solve our problems are being created on a daily basis, no doubt to the chagrin of antediluvian NGOs. Next year should be better still, so have yourselves a happy and even more modified New Year.

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