

**A FINE GROUNDSMAN**

When Joni Mitchell released *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* in 1975, “the environment” still referred more to the area where you lived than a major political issue. She was singing about sprinklers as the soundtrack to American suburbia rather than a waste of water.

Decades later, software engineer Christopher Klein was walking home on a rainy afternoon and was struck by how many automated sprinklers were watering soaked lawns. He invented Rachio, a smart sprinkler controller, now in its third version.

Rachio connects to the web to check hyper-local weather, then turns the sprinklers off if it’s raining or a shower is forecast. It lets you programme schedules based on your location and landscape details. And the ecosystem now encompasses natural fertiliser replacements.

It takes some time to set up Rachio and its app – you can segment your garden into eight zones if different parts have different irrigation needs. But if you want to create the perfect lawn – and be sensitive to the environment into the bargain – Rachio makes a fine groundsman. *Rachio 3, £276, desertcart.co.uk*

**A CLOUD-BUSTING PEN AND PAPER PAD**

In late 2017, I was one of the first buyers of a brilliant Norwegian electronic pen and pad that recreated the feeling of writing on paper and whizzed your scribbles into the cloud.

ReMarkable was a life-changer. Being able to access my written notes instantly – and having them meticulously filed – has been useful on a daily basis.

Now there’s a new reMarkable, and I have rarely known an already magnificent product to be so comprehensively improved. As well as being reduced in price from its original £579, the pad is now far less chunky. And the three physical buttons on the bottom, which were too easy to press accidentally while you were writing, are RIP. Actions such as flicking through pages are now done by a finger-swipe. Best of all, you can now rub out a mistake just by turning the pen upside down and using the other end, like an eraser.

You can also make the the reMarkable 2 work as a reader for PDFs. And to transfer my documents from version one to two was seamless. All the pages from the old reMarkable appeared as if by magic on the new one. *reMarkable 2, £399, remarkable.com*

**A YEAR-ROUND KITCHEN GARDEN**

Over the past few years I’ve praised the Estonian indoor smart garden brand Click & Grow, and I continue to be a fan. But its own-brand seed capsules are very expensive given that, as is always the case with horticulture, there are bound to be duds.

Akarina is a Japanese variant on the same idea of growing fruit and vegetables indoors under LED light. A sub-brand of one of Japan’s most venerable lighting companies, Olympia, the Akarina kitchen vegetable patches are also hydroponic, so use only water and a nutrient-packed fertiliser. There’s an attractive Akarina product for taller plants that hangs on a wall and a very stylish £85 cubist mini-model, the 14.

Technically, the tomatoes, salads and so on you will grow in the Akarina gardens aren’t organic, but they’ll certainly be fresh and pesticide-free and you can grow them all year round, meaning reduced carbon footprint and packaging. The 01 and 14 also make rather acceptable room lights while they’re growing your supper.

*Akarina 01, £170, akarina.uk*



ILLUSTRATION: WILLIAM LUZ



## GADGETS

**The great wall of Tesla**

Elon Musk’s battery makes itself at home – and more

WORDS BY JONATHAN MARGOLIS

For more of Jonathan’s reviews, visit [ft.com/htsi](http://ft.com/htsi) @thefuturecritic

About 15 years ago, I went to a briefing saying that by 2015 or so, due to increasing demand for electricity and the growing possibility of cyber terrorism, extended power cuts were going to become part of everyday life. In short: we needed to start thinking pronto about home power plants.

It sounded like a scare story but, as with many future-gazers, the group may only have been a fraction early with their consciousness raising; in 2020 there’s been an increasing trickle of stories about power blackouts as well as the more apocalyptic “black sky events” (or massive power outages).

What if you could give your home, business and vehicles 100 per cent power security and save a huge amount – up to 75 per cent – on energy costs and do the right thing environmentally? That’s the promise of a growing movement towards home batteries, and the leading light in the field, like it or not, is the electric power innovator supreme, Elon Musk.

The Tesla Powerwall, in its second iteration and now accessorised by the Tesla

Backup Gateway 2 unit to address total blackouts, is such a home battery: and there are installers in the UK. A single Tesla Powerwall 2 – charged up either by solar panels or by off-peak conventional power – can keep all systems go in the average house for a few days. According to a Guildford installer, Glenn Ashby of Techfor Energy, one multi-battery system he has set up in a large Surrey home could power 200 small homes for weeks. This bank of Powerwalls, Ashby says, is replenished by a tennis court-sized network of solar panels and keeps the owners’ Tesla cars charged on the side.

Tesla has also managed to make a big, white oblong box look cool.

Pricing is complicated. For a large house installation with solar panels, Ashby suggests £17,500 or up, but there are many variables. For example, VAT is reduced for buyers who are over 60 years old. Best have a chat with him or another installer. Google throws up several. ■HTSI

*Tesla Powerwall 2, from £7,500 per unit*

**DETAILS**

Energy capacity: 135kWh  
Size: 115x147x75cm.  
Warranty: 10yrs

