

Packing, Improved

Johannes Schneider may not have the coolest invention on this list, but it sure is practical. The University of Mainz researcher and his team developed an algorithm that broke the record for fitting a given number of different-size discs into the smallest circle. The algorithm improves on its competitors (yes, there are competitors) in that it's better at detecting false starts and backtracking when it hits on an inelegant configuration. Schneider believes that his algorithm could benefit packaging and shipping companies by helping them use their resources more efficiently.

