WebWatch

The GMO Show

To go GMO or not to go GMO? That is the question asked increasingly around the world. Probably nowhere is it asked more seriously than in Europe, home of this informative GMO safety page. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany hosts this large, news-based GMO Safety site that takes no obvious position on the controversy. At press time, containment of genetically engineered plants and the effects of transgenic technology on water quality, nematodes, and earthworms dominated the news. Informative videos abound and debates on both sides of the topic are easy to find. An important aspect of the site, dubbed 'coexistence,' is aimed at encouraging parallel, compatible systems of GMOs and organic agriculture in food processing.

[www.gmo-safety.eu]

Poison Peptides

Home to information on over 1750 peptides, the Antimicrobial Peptide Database is a popular resource for anyone interested in novel agents for resistant microbes. These intriguing biomolecules, each with fewer than 100 amino acid residues, are produced by bacteria, fungi, plants, and animals, and are inhibitory at concentrations of less than 100 μ M. Not surprisingly, many of them are antibacterial and/or antifungal, but a small percentage actually work against viruses while others have anti-tumor properties. The site contains structural and sequence information on various peptides. There is also a peptide designer tool to improve the antimicrobial activity of peptides and a predictor that will take an input sequence, characterize it, and match it against peptides in the database.

[<http://aps.unmc.edu/AP/main.php>]

Bite-sized

Our pearly whites may sometimes cause us pain, but as a potential source of stem cells, they may ultimately save us pain if those cells can be harnessed to regenerate new teeth, bone, and cartilage. A more complete understanding of teeth at the molecular level is an important goal and the University of Helsinki's Gene Expression in Tooth Web site is definitely a step in the right direction. The site is a compilation of efforts from contributing researchers, with data originating mostly from published reports. Over

Garden Gone Wild

A botanical effort by one of the most enthused, nonprofessional botanists you will find anywhere, US Wildflowers is a garden of many delights. Featuring information and images on almost 300 different species, the site is a labor of love for Gerry Williamson, a self-described hobbyist whose fascination with wildflowers drove him to put together this impressive collection. Here you will find information about wildflowers in all 50 states, easily accessed through a pop-up menu of state names. The site contains many links to other useful pages and most of these are also state-specific. The photos are beautiful and were also a strong motivation for the author to design the site in the first place.

[<http://uswildflowers.com>]

Spotted Jewelweed's bright color makes it a favorite of hummingbirds. © 2009 Gerry Williamson.

40 different research sections subdivide the information, including growth factors, signaling molecules, methods, extracellular and intracellular molecules, and genes expressed in specific tissue domains, such as the enamel epithelia, dental papilla, and the basement membrane. A vast collection of references and genetic diseases/traits round out the offerings, giving any visitor a lot to chew on.

[<http://bite-it.helsinki.fi>]

On First

It is said that science is both the easiest and the most difficult subject to write about. It is easy because there is no shortage of fascinating stories to tell, but difficult because of the need to carefully choose language to explain complicated concepts in ways that everyone can understand. Finding that sweet spot of effective scientific communication is FirstScience.com, an up-to-the-minute news site whose focus on fun takes it in many directions. In the news section, articles are intriguing ("Solving the Dilemma of Gender Imbalance," for example), while the blogs are aimed at grabbing readers ("The 2000 Year-old Computer"). There are poems and quotes, games and quizzes, sights and sounds, and a free newsletter and video news to boot. Information is sorted into nine categories

and a search engine helps retrieve information from a huge archive.

[www.firstscience.com/site/home.asp]

World Wide Webdirectory

To thoroughly cover the academic world of biology by spanning both the virtual world of the Web and the physical world is no small task. Up for the challenge is Biology WebDirectory, a tidily organized collection of links to thousands of interesting, relevant pages. From the U.S. alone, there are over 25,000 selections, for example. With representation of 16 countries in the Americas, Europe, and Asia, Biology WebDirectory is truly a global resource. Information is bundled into 11 broad categories in lists hundreds of pages long, and can be easily retrieved by the excellent keyword-based search engine.

[www.biologydir.com]

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