

WebWatch

Future Schlock?

Wouldn't it be great to see into the future? Everyone would like to gaze into a crystal ball from time to time. Not everyone, however, has looked at the future in the past tense, which is one of the unusual perspectives of Phrenicea.com. Proudly (albeit a bit inaccurately) proclaiming to be "predicting the ultimate outcome of the Internet and biotechnology revolutions," the viewpoint of this unusual web site is nothing if not confident. Take for example, its 'observations' that the most prestigious jobs of the mid-21st century involve hands-on, blue-collar work or that pets were banned in 2030 and replaced by automatons. Yes, it's all a bit of a stretch, but it's all mostly in fun, as well.

[www.phrenicea.com]

Structure Conjecture

"What if they gave a war and nobody came?" In the new millennium, that rather irreverent 1960s question has been turned on its head to "what if we had a database and no one annotated it?" Welcome to PDBWiki, the web site that aims to enhance the quality of data in the Protein Database (PDB) through community-supplied knowledge. With over 61,000 entries, PDB has a lot of room for commenting and this is what PDBWiki aims to provide. Several options are available, including comments/questions, relevant links, and discussions. PDBWiki's legion of knowledgeable followers will, no doubt, help to increase the accuracy of PDB entries, at no cost, to boot. Kudos to all involved for their ongoing efforts on this important resource.

[http://pdbwiki.org/index.php/Main_Page]

You Aren't What You Eat!

Tasked with collecting "objective, science-based information on the use of genetic engineering in the agri-food industry," GMO Compass is an all-encompassing European-based source of information on these high-tech consumables. With coverage ranging from the latest news (for example, the new blue roses) to an enormous user-searchable database, GMO Compass is surely one of the most significant sites on this subject to appear on the Web. You can learn a lot just by scrolling through its pages. Were you aware, for example, of the great divide between European and the U.S. on GMOs in the food of each country?

Photon Micrographs

It doesn't take an electron microscope to produce beautiful and educational images of tiny life forms. That message is clearly in focus at Micrographia.com, where an eclectic collection of (mostly) microorganisms is on display 24/7. From the movie of a tiny juggling act on the opening page to an expansive set of images sorted biologically, Micrographia wows with its pictures, and there's no shortage of them to be seen. But, there's more at the site than the photos that meet the eye. With interesting articles ("The Microscopy of Inkjet Printing"), editorials, tutorials, microscopy projects, and archives of previous content, Micrographia is a full-service station for light-based microbial delights.



Image of a *Brachionus* with its foot attached to the underside of a cover glass. © 2009 John Walsh, www.micrographia.com.

Did you know that no genetically modified fruits or vegetables are on the market in the EU or that genetically modified tomatoes have disappeared from U.S. stores?

[www.gmo-compass.org/eng/home]

Epidemics

One of the most significant properties of almost all species of bacteria is their ability to expand rapidly from a single cell into a choking overpopulation in a short time frame—under the right conditions. Spanning a continuum from planet-saving good to tasty food components to pathogenically bad, bacteria's space in the ecosystem is enormous. Covering this territory is the Virtual Museum of Bacteria, whose clever visual metaphor provides a good accounting of the site's content. Main exhibits include pathogenic bacteria, bacteriophages, origin of life, food/water safety, antibiotics, and vaccination. Probably the most impressive section is the Bacterial Species Cabinet, where Dr. T.M. Wassenaar has assembled a thoughtful collection of species-based links and facts. Like its real-world cousin the Smithsonian, the Virtual Museum of Bacteria offers free admission to all who view its exhibits.

[www.bacteriamuseum.org]

Sci Q

There was a time when one had a burning question to be answered and a librarian was consulted, but even at its best, that only worked for general interest topics. Science questions require a more authoritative treatment and that is exactly what the designers of asksci.com have begun to create. Organized recently at the University of California at Irvine by a group of graduate students, AskSci is structured a bit like Digg (www.digg.com) for scientists, with a format focused exclusively on questions and answers. Like Digg, answers can be voted up, providing a sort of immediate peer-review. If, like recent inquirers on the site, you need to know how to troubleshoot a Western blot or what happened at the ICSB 2009 meeting, asksci.com is the place to go.

[<http://asksci.com>]

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