

edited by Mitch Leslie



EXHIBIT

Spicing Up Medicine

Today they are found in every kitchen, but 500 years ago spices such as black pepper were so rare and valuable they provoked a land grab of overseas colonies by the European powers. People craved spices not only for their zesty flavor and aroma, but for their supposed curative powers. This exhibit from the biomedical library at the University of California, Los Angeles, explores the natural history, chemistry, and medical uses of 29 spices—from chocolate to chili pepper.

Vanilla, for instance, contains a mild anesthetic and capsaicin, the same fiery chemical found in chiles. Patients have taken vanilla (above left) for everything from hysteria to fever to impotence. Cardamom (right), which contains a mix of essential oils, reputedly soothes digestion and fights colds and bronchitis. Although many spices are rich in molecules with potential benefits, the site notes, scientific studies have corroborated few of these traditional treatments.

unitproj.library.ucla.edu/biomed/spice/index.cfm

DATABASES

Trains, Planes, and Automobiles

If you're a risk analyst tracking automobile accidents or an environmental scientist fretting over pipeline safety, pull over at the new Web site TranStats, a shopping mall of data on different forms of transportation and their social and environmental costs. Gathered here are more than 100 government, university, and private transportation databases—ranging from annual U.S. energy production and consumption to fatal traffic wrecks. The aviation accident database provides information on the number of injuries, sequence of events, and cause for crashes since 1983. Download the air-quality database to find levels of lead, sulfur dioxide, particles, and ozone for scores of American cities and towns since 1996.

www.transtats.bts.gov



RESOURCES

Netting New Catfish

Catfish range in size from dainty 2-centimeter parasites to 5-meter, 330-kilogram lunkers. Over time, some have jettisoned their eyes; others have evolved the ability to waddle across land on their forefins. For a haul of taxonomic data on this diverse group, try the new site from the All Catfish Species Inventory, whose goal is to describe nearly all of the world's undiscovered species of catfish within the next 5 years.

The 2-month-old site, hosted by the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, lists the number of species and genera for 37 families of catfishes. (Below, a leopard cactus catfish, *Pseudocanthicus leopardis*.) You can track down scientists working on each group and find field projects around the world. Links connect to an atlas of catfish skeletal anatomy and to pages on particular families. There's also a bibliography and a Listserv, along with links to catfish news stories—a Mexican species announced last October, for example, belongs to a new family. The site will expand to include identification keys, digital photos of type specimens, and distribution maps.

clade.acnatsci.org/allcatfish

EDUCATION

Hooked on Classical Science

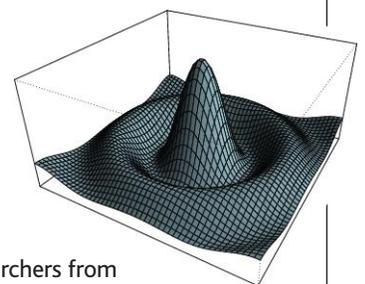
They didn't have telescopes, electricity, or computers, but the Romans and ancient Greeks could boast some impressive technological and scientific achievements. For instance, by cleverly applying geometry, the Greek astronomer Eratosthenes (circa 280–200 B.C.) used the height of the sun at noon on the summer solstice to calculate the circumference of Earth.

Find out more about Greek and Roman scientific and technical prowess from this encyclopedia created by Tracey Rihll, a historian at the University of Swansea in Wales. With pithy accounts and a bevy of outside links, the growing site profiles ancient inventions such as the Antikythera mechanism, an intricate clockwork instrument from the 1st century B.C. that was probably an astronomical computer. Capsule biographies portray ancient thinkers such as the Roman natural historian Pliny the Elder, who was killed in A.D. 79 while observing the eruption of Mount Vesuvius.

www.swan.ac.uk/classics/staff/ter/grst

TOOLS

Open-Source Stats



Researchers from epidemiologists to atmospheric chemists rely on a statistics program called S-PLUS to crunch their data. The 2-year-old R project has developed an open-source version of this workhorse package. The free software's capabilities range from nonlinear modeling to time-series analysis and include

many graphing options. Contributors include John Chambers, who led the Bell Labs group that wrote the S language in the 1970s.

www.r-project.org

Send site suggestions to netwatch@aaas.org. Archive: www.sciencemag.org/netwatch

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Downloaded from <http://science.sciencemag.org/> on November 24, 2020

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