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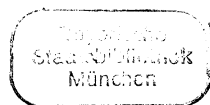
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## Contents

### Contents of Number 1/2

#### *Invited Trends Article*

- Towards an Understanding of Plant Gene Regulation: The Action of Nuclear Factors  
K. WEISING and G. KAHL 1

#### *Original Communications*

- Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladonia macaronesica*  
A. G. GONZÁLEZ, J. B. BARRERA, E. M<sup>A</sup> R. PÉREZ, and C. E. H. PADRÓN 12
- On the Chemistry of the Lichen Genus *Lasallia* Mérat (In German)  
B. POSNER, G. B. FEIGE, and CH. LEUCKERT 19
- Growth and Secondary Product Formation of *in vitro* Cultures from the Liverwort *Reboulia hemisphaerica*  
R. M. S. C. MORAIS and H. BECKER 28
- Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana  
V. SCHUBERT, R. DIENER, and A. MOSANDL 33
- UV Radiation Dependent Flavonoid Accumulation of *Cistus laurifolius* L.  
TH. VOGT, P.-G. GÜLZ, and H. REZNIK 37
- Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpan Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase  
U. MACKENBROCK and W. BARZ 43
- Characterization of Pectic Enzymes from the Chickpea Pathogen *Ascochyta rabiei*  
R. TENHAKEN and W. BARZ 51
- Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures of Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and Their Involvement in Pterocarpan Phytoalexin Biosynthesis  
W. GUNIA, W. HINDERER, U. WITTKAMPE, and W. BARZ 58
- Ascorbic Acid as Indicator of Damage to Forest. A Correlation with Air Quality  
H. B. STEGMANN, P. SCHULER, H.-J. RUFF, M. KNOLLMÜLLER, and W. LORETH 67
- On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase  
S. BICKEL-SANDKÖTTER, K. ESSER, and M. HORBACH 71
- Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation  
G. GÜNTHER and H. LAASCH 79
- Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes  
S. C. SABAT, V. VIJAYAVERGIYA, B. C. TRIPATHY, and P. MOHANTY 87
- X-Ray Structure Analysis of a Cyanoacrylate Inhibitor of Photosystem II Electron Transport  
H. G. MCFADDEN, D. C. CRAIG, J. L. HUPPATZ, and J. N. PHILLIPS 93
- Characterization of Reaction Center-B875 Complex of *Rhodocyclus gelatinosus*: Q<sub>B</sub> Site Properties Derived from Reconstitution Experiments  
I. AGALIDIS, E. RIVAS, and F. REISS-HUSSON 99
- Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes  
M. BAIER and W. HARTUNG 106
- Identification by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis  
W. GREENAWAY, J. MAY, T. SCAYSBROOK, and F. R. WHATLEY 111

Composition of the Surface Lipids from the European Mole (*Talpa europaea*)

J. JACOB and U. HOPPE 122

Biogenic Amine Levels in the Haemolymph of the Cabbage Armyworm Larvae (*Mamestra brassicae*) Following Injection of Octopaminergic Insecticides

T. SHIMIZU and N. TAKEDA 127

## X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. X. Interactions with Chlortetracycline Hydrochloride

M. SUWALSKY, F. NEIRA, and I. SÁNCHEZ 133

## Product Release is Not the Rate-Limiting Step during Cytochalasin B-Induced ATPase Activity of Monomeric Actin

P. DANCKER, L. HESS, and K. RITTER 139

Incorporation of a *Calliphora* Arylphorin Gene into the Germ Line of *Drosophila* by P-Element-Mediated Transformation

M. DORSCH and K. SCHELLER 145

Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones

G. GÄDE 149

Haemocyanin Synthesis in the Crayfish, *Astacus leptodactylus*: *in vitro* Production by the Midgut Gland after Addition of Oxygen Binding Modulators and Exogenous Copper

R. HENNECKE, G. GELLISSSEN, and K.-D. SPINDLER 163

## Notes

Dimethyldithiolanes in the Anal Sac Secretion of the Weasel, *Mustela nivalis*

A. J. BUGGLASS, F. M. C. DARLING, and J. S. WALTERHOUSE 166

## Contents of Number 3/4

## Original Communications

Lepistirones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina)

W.-R. ABRAHAM, H.-P. HANSEN, and I. URBASCH 169

Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia*

H. YAMAMOTO, S. KAWAI, J. MAYUMI, T. TANAKA, M. IINUMA, and M. MIZUNO 172

A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers (In German)

H.-W. RAUWALD and D.-D. NIYONZIMA 177

Occurrence of (-)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphyogyna brongniartii*

J. SPÖRLE, H. BECKER, N. S. ALLEN, and M. P. GUPTA 183

## Time-Course Studies of Phytoalexins and Glucosinolates in UV-Irradiated Turnip Tissue

K. MONDE, M. TAKASUGI, J. A. LEWIS, and G. R. FENWICK 189

The Formation of Hydroxylated Phenazines by *Pseudomonas fluorescens* Y<sub>4</sub> upon Addition of Be<sup>2+</sup> to the Culture Medium – a Defense Mechanism? (In German)

K. TARAZ, E. M. SCHAFFNER, H. BUDZIKIEWICZ, H. KORTH, and G. PULVERER 194

## Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Biosurfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea

D. SCHULZ, A. PASSERI, M. SCHMIDT, S. LANG, F. WAGNER, V. WRAY, and W. GUNKEL 197

Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK 1

A. PASSERI, S. LANG, F. WAGNER, and V. WRAY 204

- Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants  
K. POREMBA, W. GUNKEL, S. LANG, and F. WAGNER 210
- The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis*  
T. KENTEMICH, G. HAVERKAMP, and H. BOTHE 217
- Significance of the Non-Oxidative Pentose Phosphate Pathway in *Aspergillus oryzae* Grown on Different Carbon Sources  
M. L. PELEATO, T. MUIÑO-BLANCO, J. A. CEBRIAN PÉREZ, and M. J. LÓPEZ-PÉREZ 223
- Resonance Raman Spectroscopic Evidence for the Identity of the Bacteriochlorophyll *c* Organization in Protein-Free and Protein-Containing Chlorosomes from *Chloroflexus aurantiacus*  
P. HILDEBRANDT, K. GRIEBENOW, A. R. HOLZWARTH, and K. SCHAFFNER 228
- Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts  
CH. KLUGHAMMER and U. SCHREIBER 233
- Turnover of the D-1 Reaction Center Polypeptide from Photosystem II in Intact Spruce Needles and Spinach Leaves  
D. GODDE, H. SCHMITZ, and M. WEIDNER 245
- Synthesis and Biological Behavior of a Boronated Analogue of the Antiestrogen U 23,469-M  
F. WELLMANN, R. ABRAHAM, R. MÜLLER, and D. GABEL 252
- Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae)  
M. TÓTH, G. SZÖCS, C. LÖFSTEDT, B. S. HANSSON, F. SCHMIDT, and W. FRANCKE 257
- Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.)  
J. R. ALDRICH, J. P. KOCHANSKY, W. R. LUSBY, and M. BORGES 264
- Characterization of Two Thioredoxins in Pig Heart Including a New Mitochondrial Protein  
J. BODENSTEIN and H. FOLLMANN 270
- Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. I. Studies on the Redox Properties of Bovine Lens Proteins  
E. KLEBER, R. KRÖNER, and E. F. ELSTNER 280
- Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. II. Mechanism of Hydrogenperoxide Formation and Inhibition by Iodide  
R. KRÖNER, E. KLEBER, and E. F. ELSTNER 285
- Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors  
R. LEDERHOFER, J. SCHNAKENBERG, and H. STIEVE 291
- On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis  
M. DI GIULIO 305
- Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions  
N. KARGER and H.-D. LÜDEMANN 313
- Notes*
- Accumulation of the Phytoalexin Glyceollin I in Soybean Nodules Infected by a *Bradyrhizobium japonicum nifA* Mutant  
M. PARNISKE, H.-M. FISCHER, H. HENNECKE, and D. WERNER 318
- Partial Characterization of anti-HLA Class II Antibodies Isolated by Aid of Sepharose-Peptide Immunoabsorbents  
A. CHERSI, M. C. MORGANTI-KOSSMANN, M. EVANGELISTA, and C. CENCIARELLI 321

Contents of Number 5/6

*Original Communications*

- New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilantheid Ferns  
E. WOLLENWEBER and J. N. ROITMAN 325

- Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood  
S. TAHARA, M. MORIYAMA, S. ORIHARA, J. L. INGHAM, J. KAWABATA, and J. MIZUTANI 331
- Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids  
S. TAHARA, J. L. INGHAM, and J. MIZUTANI 341
- Novel Bisabolanoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves  
Y. HASHIDOKO, S. TAHARA, and J. MIZUTANI 349
- Highly Oxygenated Bisabolanoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves  
Y. HASHIDOKO, S. TAHARA, N. IWAYA, and J. MIZUTANI 357
- Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid  
M. SIMANTIRAS and E. LEISTNER 364
- Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth.  
E. HÄUSLER, M. PETERSEN, and A. W. ALFERMANN 371
- Further Studies of Sequestration of Alkaloids in *Papaver somniferum* L. Latex Vacuoles  
M. F. ROBERTS, B. C. HOMEYER, and T. D. T. PHAM 377
- Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose  
G. G. GROSS and K. DENZEL 389
- Biotransformation of  $\beta$ -Damascone by *Botrytis cinerea*  
E. SCHWAB and P. SCHREIER 395
- On the Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophore of the Pyoverdins (In German)  
H. SCHÄFER, K. TARAZ, and H. BUDZIKIEWICZ 398
- The Effect of Activated Oxygen Species on Nitrogenase of *Anabaena variabilis*  
S. N. BAGCHI, A. ERNST, and P. BÖGER 407
- Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate Kinase from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties  
G. RUYTERS, N. GROTHJANN, and W. KOWALLIK 416
- Calorimetric Study on the Interactions of 5-*n*-Heptadec(en)ylresolcinols from Cereal Grains with Zwitterionic Phospholipid (DPPC)  
A. B. HENDRICH and A. KOZUBEK 423
- Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose  
T. CSERHÁTI and Z. SZIGETI 428
- Slit Scan Flow Cytometry of Isolated Chromosomes Following Fluorescence Hybridization: an Approach of Online Screening for Specific Chromosomes and Chromosome Translocations  
M. HAUSMANN, G. DUDIN, J. A. ATEN, R. HEILIG, E. DIAZ, and CH. CREMER 433
- Podoscypic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podoscypa* Species  
G. ERKEL, T. ANKE, R. VELTEN, and W. STEGLICH 442
- Electrogenic Na<sup>+</sup>–Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors  
P. HOCHSTRATE 451
- Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium  
H. STIEVE, H. REUSS, H. T. HENNIG, and J. KLOMFASS 461
- Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments  
P. PAWŁOWSKI and M. FIKUS 487
- Notes*
- Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae  
E. WOLLENWEBER, K. MANN, and J. N. ROITMAN 495

- Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent  
K.-H. GLÜSENKAMP, W. DROSDZIOK, G. EBERLE, E. JÄHDE, and M. F. RAJEWSKY 498
- Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions  
H. HOHLFELD, C. LÜTZ, and D. STRACK 502
- Contents of Number 7/8
- Original Communications*
- New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida*  
F. J. ARRIAGA-GINER, J. RULLKÖTTER, T. M. PEAKMAN, and E. WOLLENWEBER 507
- New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin (*Lupinus albus* L.)  
Y. SHIBUYA, S. TAHARA, Y. KIMURA, and J. MIZUTANI 513
- Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus*  
K. DOERK, L. WITTE, and A. W. ALFERMANN 519
- Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdinin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2"  
(In German)  
K. TARAZ, D. SEINSCHÉ, and H. BUDZIKIEWICZ 522
- Ferribactins – the Biogenetic Precursors of Pyoverdins  
K. TARAZ, R. TAPPE, H. SCHRÖDER, U. HOHLNEICHER, I. GWOSE, H. BUDZIKIEWICZ, G. MOHN, and J. F. LEFÈVRE 527
- Two Pyoverdins from *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* R.  
(In German)  
S. GIPP, J. HAHN, K. TARAZ, and H. BUDZIKIEWICZ 534
- Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata*  
F. LÓPEZ-FIGUEROA 542
- Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes  
SN. BAKALOVA, L. BICZÓK, and T. BÉRCES 549
- A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition  
A. TREBST 557
- Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors  
F. SATO, Y. YAMADA, S. S. KWAK, K. ICHINOSE, M. KISHIDA, N. TAKAHASHI, and S. YOSHIDA 563
- Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition  
M. EL KAOUA, E. DUVAL, and D. LAVAL-MARTIN 569
- Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein  
J. D. NABER and J. J. S. VAN RENSEN 575
- Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects (In German)  
H. J. BESTMANN, M. PIETSCHMANN, K. STEINMEIER, and O. VOSTROWSKY 579
- o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity  
H.-J. SIEWEKE and E. LEISTNER 585
- Induction of Nitrate Reductase Activity by Arginine in the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea*  
J. BEDNARZ and G. H. SCHMID 591
- Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*)  
M. BOLL 597
- Plant ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase – Recent Advances and Biotechnological Perspectives (A Review)  
L. A. KLECZKOWSKI, P. VILLAND, A. LÖNNEBORG, O.-A. OLSEN, and E. LÜTHI 605
- Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum*  
TH. STARKE, T. P. LINKKILA, and J. P. GOGARTEN 613



Effect of Azide on the ATPase Activity of Isolated CF <sub>1</sub> I. B. MINKOW and H. STROTMANN	621	Directed Cell Movement with Steric Exclusion H. GRULER	697
Mass Spectrometric Analysis of N <sub>2</sub> -Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium <i>Oscillatoria chalybea</i> P. HE, K. P. BADER, and G. H. SCHMID	629	<i>Notes</i>	
Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O <sub>2</sub> - and H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> -Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured <i>via</i> Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching U. SCHREIBER, H. REISING, and CH. NEUBAUER	635	No Correlation between Plasmid Content and Ability to Reduce Nitrate in Wild-Type Strains of <i>Rhodobacter capsulatus</i> A. WITT and J.-H. KLEMMER	703
Monosaccharides and Disaccharides Decrease the K <sub>m</sub> for Phosphorylation of a Membrane-Bound Enzyme ATPase E. N. CHINI, J. R. MEYER-FERNANDES, and M. SOLA-PENNA	644	Growth Inhibitions on Human Cancer Cell Cultures with the Indole Sulphur-Containing Phytoalexins and Their Analogues CH. TEMPÊTE, M. DEVYS, and M. BARBIER	706
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. XI. Interactions with Chloramphenicol M. SUWALSKY, M. A. ESPINOZA, I. SÁNCHEZ, and F. VILLENA	647	Contents of Number 9/10	
Phenotypic Traits and Regulatory Role of RNA Folding in Molecular Selection A. FERNÁNDEZ	656	<i>Invited Trends Article</i>	
Specific Crystal Chemical Interactions between Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds and Cholesterol B. CONTAG	663	Duplicated Sequence Elements and Their Function in Plant Mitochondria B. WISSINGER, R. HIESEL, W. SCHOBEL, M. UNSELD, A. BRENNICKE, and W. SCHUSTER	709
Studies in Enteric Anthelmintics: Activity Profile of Prodrug of a Bisbenzimidazole A. M. KHAN, S. GUPTA, J. C. KATIYAR, S. K. SING, V. L. SHARMA, S. SHARMA, and A. P. BHADURI	673	<i>Original Communications</i>	
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer <i>Eldana saccharina</i> (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) B. V. BURGER, A. E. NELL, D. SMIT, and H. S. C. SPIES	678	UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from <i>Mastigocladus laminosus</i> S. SCHNEIDER, TH. WOKUSCH, H. TILTSCHER, R. FISCHER, and H. SCHEER	717
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture P. FROMHERZ and TH. VETTER	687	Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of <i>Lupinus polyphyllus</i> and <i>Lupinus hartwegii</i> J. BERLIN, L. FECKER, C. RÜGENHAGEN, C. SA-TOR, D. STRACK, L. WITTE, and V. WRAY	725
		Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of <i>Lupinus</i> – a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures J. BERLIN, C. RÜGENHAGEN, M. RIPPERT, and S. ERDOGAN	735

Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of <i>Tilia tomentosa</i> Moench. P.-G. GÜLZ, R. B. N. PRASAD, and E. MÜLLER 743	Dithiocarbamate Derivatives as Herbicide Safeners G. MATOLCSY, Á. TOMBOR, and A. GIMESI 815
Are Bacterial Sensory Systems Models for Phytochrome Action? Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis of the Phytochrome Module Related to Bacterial Transmitter Modules H. A. W. SCHNEIDER-POETSCH, CH. SENSEN, and S. HANELT 750	An Overview of the Mechanisms of Action of Herbicide Safeners K. K. HATZIOS 819
Subunit $\delta$ of Chloroplast $F_0F_1$ -ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial $F_0F_1$ -ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy S. ENGELBRECHT, J. REED, F. PENIN, D. C. GAUTHERON, and W. JUNGE 759	Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Herbicides in Maize Seedlings Z. EKLER and G. R. STEPHENSON 828
Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II B. SVENSSON, I. VASS, and ST. STYRING 765	Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize I. JABLONKAI 836
Inhibition of Oxygen Evolution by Cacalol and Its Derivatives B. LOTINA-HENNSEN, J. L. ROQUE-RESÉNDIZ, M. JIMÉNEZ, and M. AGUILAR 777	Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn C. K. COTTINGHAM and K. K. HATZIOS 846
N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases of the Brine Shrimp <i>Artemia</i> : Partial Purification and Characterization K.-D. SPINDLER and B. FUNKE-HÖPFNER 781	Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Nontreated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots J. V. DEAN, J. W. GRONWALD, and M. P. ANDERSON 850
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water ( $D_2O$ ). For Example: Human Cholinesterase (In German) CH. HEYDE and M. WENZEL 789	Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize D. L. KUNKEL, J. C. STEFFENS, and R. R. BELLINDER 856
Milestones in the Development of Herbicide Safeners G. R. STEPHENSON and T. YAACOBY 794	Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice S. HAN and K. K. HATZIOS 861
Chemistry and Structure-Activity Relationships of Herbicide Safeners T. KÓMÍVES and K. K. HATZIOS 798	Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of <i>Phytophthora</i> spp. Fungi G. OROS and T. KÓMÍVES 866
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosaferens F. DUTKA 805	Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a <i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance G. GULLNER, T. KÓMÍVES, and L. KIRÁLY 875
Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of Acetal Compounds Z. EKLER and F. DUTKA 810	The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn G. L. LAMOUREUX and D. G. RUSNESS 882

Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiocarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity T. YUYAMA, S. SHIRAKURA, and K. ISHIZUKA	887	Oxabectrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress R. E. WILKINSON and R. R. DUNCAN	950
Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr D. L. SHANER	893	Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants J. CH. HALL and M. SONI	957
Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize M. BARRETT and J. M. MAXSON	897	<i>Notes</i>	
Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropanoate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 K. KREUZ, J. GAUDIN, J. STINGELIN, and E. EBERT	901	Iridoid Glucosides from <i>Plantago altissima</i> L., <i>Plantago lanceolata</i> L., <i>Plantago atrata</i> Hoppe and <i>Plantago argentea</i> Chaix. N. HANDJIEVA, H. SAADI, and L. EVSTATIEVA	963
Influence of Safeners on the <i>in vivo</i> and <i>in vitro</i> Metabolism of Bentazon and Metolachlor by Grain Sorghum Shoots: a Preliminary Report D. E. MORELAND and F. T. CORBIN	906	The Inhibition of Glutathione Reductase by Quinones D. A. BIRONAITĖ, N. K. ČĖNAS, J. J. KULYS, A. G. MEDENTSEV, and V. K. AKIMENKO	966
Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases C. FEDTKE	915		
Effect of the Safener Dichlormid on Maize Peroxygenase and Lipxygenase E. BLÉE	920		
Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots I. Cs. BARTA	926		
Effect of a Safener Towards Thiocarbamates on Plant Lipid Metabolism K. O. ABULNAJA and J. L. HARWOOD	931		
Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlormid on Lipid Synthesis and Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum K. K. HATZIOS	934		
Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonyleurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides R. M. DEVLIN and I. I. ZBIEC	939		
Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors H. M. MILHOMME, CH. ROUX, and J. BASTIDE	945		
		Contents of Number 11/12	
		<i>Invited Trends Article</i>	
		Plant Resistance Genes for Fungal Pathogens – Physiological Models and Identification in Cereal Crops W. KNOGGE	969
		<i>Original Communications</i>	
		Quantitative Characterization of Soil Organic Matter and Its Fractionation Products by Solid State High Resolution C-13 (CPMAS) Spectroscopy R. FRÜND and H.-D. LÜDEMANN	982
		Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of <i>Lentihellus omphalodes</i> A. STÄRK, T. ANKE, U. MOCEK, and W. STEGLICH	989

- Isolation and Spectroscopic Characterization of the Pyoverdinin Chromophore and of Its 5-Hydroxy Analogue (In German)  
J. MICHELS, H. BENONI, G. BRISKOT, J. LEX, H. SCHMICKLER, K. TARAZ, H. BUDZIKIEWICZ, H. KORTH, and G. PULVERER 993
- Iridoids from *Plantago carinata* Schrad.  
H. SAADI, N. HANDJIEVA, A. IVANOVA, and S. POPOV 1001
- UDP-D-Xylose: Flavonol 3-O-Xylosyltransferase from Young Leaves of *Euonymus alatus* f. *ciliatodentatus*  
N. ISHIKURA and Z. YANG 1003
- Acceleration of Enzyme-Dependent Carthamin Formation by Manganese with Diversed Valence States  
K. SAITO 1011
- Studies on Porphobilinogen-Deaminase from *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*  
S. R. CORREA GARCÍA, M. V. ROSSETTI, and A. M. DEL C. BATLLE 1017
- Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration  
G. WÄLZLEIN and E. K. PISTORIUS 1024
- The Flash Pattern of Photosynthetic Oxygen Evolution after Treatment with Low Concentrations of Hydroxylamine as a Function of the Previous S<sub>1</sub>/S<sub>0</sub>-Ratio. Further Evidence that NH<sub>2</sub>OH Reduces the Water Oxidizing Complex in the Dark  
J. MESSINGER, S. PAULY, and H. T. WITT 1033
- Is the *in vivo* Photosystem I Function Resistant to Photoinhibition? An Answer from Photoacoustic and Far-Red Absorbance Measurements in Intact Leaves  
M. HAVAUX and M. EYLETTERS 1038
- Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenoids  
H. LINDEN, N. MISAWA, D. CHAMOVITZ, I. PECKER, J. HIRSCHBERG, and G. SANDMANN 1045
- The Greening Process in Cress Seedlings. III. Age-Dependent Changes in the Capacity of the Tetrapyrrole Pathway  
U. OSTER, I. BLOS, and W. RÜDIGER 1052
- Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria  
W. OETTMEIER, S. PREUSSE, and MICHAEL HAEFS 1059
- Replication of ColE1-Related Plasmids at Increased Growth Temperature in Dependence on the Rom Function (In German)  
S. RIETHDORF, A. ULRICH, and M. HECKER 1063
- Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation  
G. BUCHBAUER, L. JIROVETZ, W. JÄGER, H. DIETRICH, CH. PLANK, and E. KARAMAT 1067
- Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachylomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis*  
B. V. BURGER and W. G. B. PETERSEN 1073
- Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Teline monspessulana*  
M. WINK, C. B. MONTLLOR, E. A. BERNAYS, and L. WITTE 1080
- Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans*  
M. SPINDLER-BARTH 1089
- Teratogenic and Metamorphosis-Inhibiting Activity of Retinoic Acid in *Ciona intestinalis* (In German)  
J. M. DENUCÉ 1094
- Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver  
S. A. FUMAGALLI, M. L. KOTLER, M. V. ROSSETTI, and A. M. DEL C. BATLLE 1101
- The Modulation of the Calcium Transport by Skeletal Muscle Sarcoplasmic Reticulum in the Hibernating European Hamster  
B. AGOSTINI, L. DE MARTINO, B. SOLTAU, and W. HASSELBACH 1109

<i>Notes</i>		Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain K. KIRSCHFELD	1134
Occurrence of Jasmonic Acid in the Red Alga <i>Gelidium latifolium</i> M. V. KRUPINA and W. DATHE	1127	Subject Index	1137
A Simple Method for Counting Small Numbers of Cells by Flow Cytometry S. BLASS and K. LENNARTZ	1130	Authors Index	1160

# UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus*

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Photosynthesis, Phycobiliproteins, Light-Harvesting Pigments, Aggregation Effects,  
High-Pressure Spectroscopy

The behaviour of monomers and trimers of C-phycocyanin and allophycocyanin under high pressure is studied by UV-VIS absorption spectroscopy. It is found that fast variations of pressure ( $\Delta p \geq 500$  bar) and/or temperature are accompanied by significant changes in the absorption spectra (intensity and/or spectral shift). The induced differences disappear, however, in part, when the samples are left for several minutes at the final pressure (relaxation effect). The observed spectral variations are different from those connected with a change in state of aggregation and could therefore be due to small modifications of the chromophore-protein arrangement.

## Introduction

Phycobiliproteins constitute the main light-harvesting pigments of cyanobacteria, red and cryptophyte algae [1–4]. Hetero-hexamers (usually termed trimers) of them form the building blocs of the phycobilisomes, extra membraneous antenna particles, which feed their excitation energy predominantly to photosystem II [5, 6]. In the phycobilisomes, several phycobiliproteins are organized in a hierarchical order:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  subunits constitute the hetero-dimeric protomers of the various individual biliproteins. They can further aggregate to hetero-hexamers (hetero-hexamers) or hetero-dodecamers (hexamers). These basic building blocs are then assembled to the phycobilisome by a complex set of linker peptides, which probably

also control the ratio of the individual pigments within the phycobilisome [7, 8]. Crystals of PEC and PC from *Mastigocladus laminosus* are made up of torus-shaped hetero-hexamers, whereas two such units, arranged face-to-face, make up the repeating unit of PC crystals from another cyanobacterium, *Agmenellum quadruplicatum* [9]. In solution, and in the absence of linkers, the aggregate number is somewhat controversial. Hetero-dimers, hetero-hexamers, and/or hetero-dodecamers have been found predominantly in solution of biliproteins from various sources, and the aggregation thermodynamics have been studied in detail in several cases, but hetero-tetramers and other aggregates have been reported as well [2]. It should be noted, however, that most of these studies have been performed before the significance of the linker peptides has been fully appreciated.

The generally applied method of choice to investigate aggregation in biliproteins, is ultracentrifugation ([2], but see [10]). Despite of the fact that this method is fast and the results are well reproducible, it should not be overlooked that the proteins

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*Abbreviations:* APC, allophycocyanin; PC, phycocyanin; PEC, phycoerythrocyanin.

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are exposed to considerable pressures. At  $250,000 \times g$ , which is common in such experiments, a 1 cm water column above the sample exerts a pressure of 250 bar. Pressures up to several hundred bars are thus experienced by the sample in an analytical cell, and pressures up to and exceeding 1 kbar in a Martin/Ames type analysis [11] using swingout rotors.

Since aggregation of many proteins is known to be affected by pressure of this magnitude [12, 13], pressure effects on biliproteins are of considerable interest, but have, to our knowledge, not been reported before. As aggregation is known to influence the UV-VIS absorption spectra of biliproteins, high pressure absorption spectroscopy is expected to be well-suited to monitor aggregation changes under pressure. In this communication we wish to present data on the behaviour of PC and APC in different states of aggregation under pressures in the range  $1 \leq p \leq 1000$  bar.

## Experimental

### *Biliproteins*

PC and APC have been isolated from *Mastigocladus laminosus* as reported before [14]. They were prepared in potassium phosphate buffer (100 mM, pH 7) and stored on ice until use a few days later.

In the isolate, APC ( $A_{650}/\text{cm} = 1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) is present as a hetero-hexamer. Hetero-dimers ( $A_{620}/\text{cm} = 1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) were prepared by the addition of the chaotropic KSCN [2, 15]. At 1 M KSCN, the pigment is present exclusively as hetero-dimer as determined by ultracentrifugation [11]. The sample referred to as APC-mix ( $A_{620}/\text{cm} = 0.5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) was obtained by addition of only 0.3 M KSCN.

The aggregation state of PC is concentration dependent. According to ultracentrifugation [11] and the position of the absorption maximum [16], the hetero-hexamer sample ( $A_{620}/\text{cm} = 1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) was >95% in this state and the PC-mix ( $A_{620}/\text{cm} = 0.5 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) contained a 1:1 mixture with hetero-dimers.

### *Apparatus*

Absorption spectra at ambient pressure were recorded with a Lambda 2 spectrophotometer (Perkin Elmer). The home-made apparatus used for the absorption measurements at high pressure is described in detail by Wokusch [17]. Six samples

can be investigated simultaneously in a high pressure reactor ( $p_{\text{max}} = 400$  MPa). The high pressure is produced by a motor driven spindle pump; it can be decreased rapidly by a release valve. The six cells are coupled to a diode array spectrophotometer (Model MCS 130, Zeiss, Oberkochen) by fiber-optics and an optical multiplexer and pressure resistant optical probes [18]. Due to the several coupling sites at the multiplexer and the probes, only a fraction of the analyzing light ( $\lambda \geq 380$  nm) reaches the detector (50% loss per coupling site). The measuring time for one full spectrum is  $< 1$  sec/sample, and the total sample volume (1.2 ml) is large compared to the volume illuminated during the measurement (0.006 ml). Any influence of the probing beam on the sample, *e.g.* photochemical reactions, should be negligible under these conditions.

The advantage of having more samples under identical conditions (pressure and temperature) is obvious. If one sample cell contains the pure solvent, the effects of pressure and temperature (refractive index change) on the transmission of the probing light beam can be corrected for. Furthermore, the cell construction is such that its diameter is invariant. Since the path of light is parallel to the cell axis, the number of molecules in the lightbeam remains constant during the measurement, and no pressure dependent concentration correction has to be applied (unless the refractive index of the buffer and that of the PC solution change differently under pressure).

To compensate for baseline drifts all spectra were shifted vertically to show zero absorption at 728 nm. No further data manipulations like averaging for noise reduction or normalization were performed and difference spectra are directly calculated from these spectra.

## Results

### *Stability of samples*

The samples were chosen with the objective to study well-defined aggregation states. These were for APC: hetero-dimers (obtained by treatment with 1 M KSCN), and hetero-hexamers (see above). The third APC sample with only 0.3 M KSCN contained a mixture of these aggregates (APC-mix). For PC, two samples with different PC concentrations were used to obtain different

aggregation equilibria. The PC hetero-hexamer is >95% pure whereas the more dilute solution represents a  $\approx 1:1$  hetero-dimer/hetero-hexamer mixture (PC-mix). A concentration yielding hetero-dimer only ( $A_{620}/\text{cm} < 0.1 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ) proved unsuitable to obtain spectra with sufficient signal-to-noise ratio. The mixtures were chosen deliberately, because any effect on the aggregation equilibrium is expected to show up most clearly if both species are present in about equal amounts.

All samples were exposed to the pressure – temperature program shown schematically in Fig. 1. First, the pressure was slowly increased by certain amounts and then held constant for short periods of time. Sets of spectra were taken continuously at 1 min intervals during both the increase and after the stop in the pressure increase (until a maximum pressure of 1000 bar was reached). Then, the pressure was rapidly decreased from 1000 to 500 bar, from 500 to 250 and so on. Again the pressure dependence and the relaxation at constant pressure of the absorption spectra were monitored after each step under constant pressure. This first cycle ( $0 < t < 180 \text{ min}$ , corresponding to the time between points A and B) was followed by a second, faster pressure increase – decrease cycle at the same temperature ( $10^\circ\text{C}$ ). Then, the temperature was increased to  $30^\circ\text{C}$  while the samples were kept under 500 bar pressure (after point c).

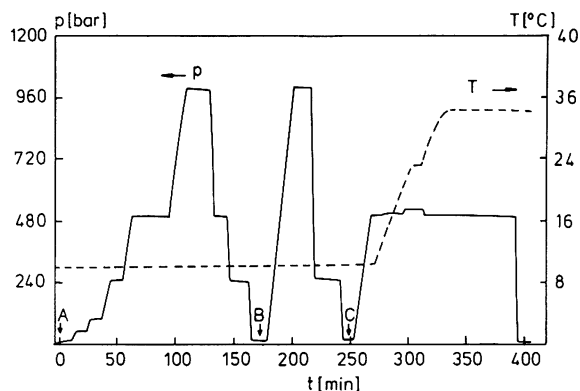


Fig. 1. Pressure (—) and temperature profile (---) of the experiment. Each minute a set of spectra (samples 1 through 5 plus buffer reference) was recorded. Up to  $t = 270 \text{ min}$ , the temperature was kept at  $10^\circ\text{C}$ ; it was then raised to 23 and finally to  $30^\circ\text{C}$ . Then, the temperature was constant again for the remaining time. The labels A, B and C correspond to the ones used in the text.

Fig. 2 displays for comparison the spectra of the samples recorded at the beginning of the experiment (point A in Fig. 1) and those taken after each of the pressure cycles (points B and C). They prove the stability of the samples during the pressure treatment. The absorption changes are negligible in the APC hetero-hexamer (Fig. 2c); e.g. the decrease in absorption at the maximum is less than 1%. The APC hetero-dimer (Fig. 2e) shows an absorption decrease of about 2% over the entire spectrum. The shape of the difference spectrum corresponds to the absorption spectrum itself, the

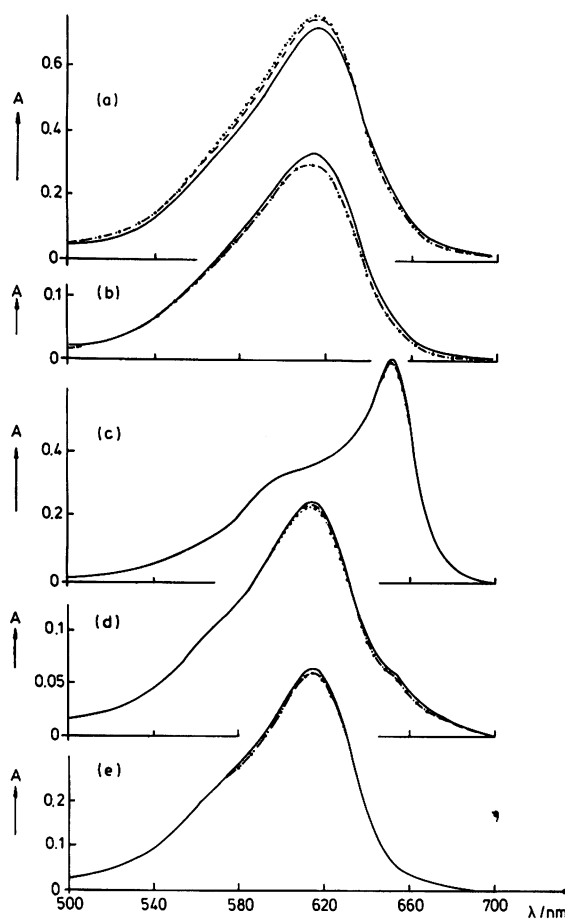


Fig. 2. Absorption spectra at  $10^\circ\text{C}$  and 10 bar at the beginning of the experiment (point A in Fig. 1, —), after the end of the first cycle to 1000 bar and back to 10 bar (point B, ---), and after the second cycle (point C, ···). a) PC hetero-hexamer, b) PC mix, c) APC hetero-hexamer, d) APC mix, e) APC hetero-dimer.



decrease could therefore be due to some precipitation. PC mix (Fig. 2b) behaves qualitatively similar to APC hetero-dimer but the effect was considerably larger (6%). Only PC hetero-hexamers (Fig. 2a) show a rather different effect. There is an increase in absorption which amounts to 5% at the maximum, and at the same time a slight blue-shift of the absorption maximum by about 2 nm. Such a band shift is indicative of decreased aggregation. However, dissociation is usually not accompanied by an increase of the molar extinction coefficient, so that some other process must take place in addition. As will be shown below, the major change in the status of this sample took place during the initial rise in pressure, after which the sample remained as stable as the others.

#### Effect of pressure

The effect of pressure was determined from the spectra (or their differences) taken at the beginning and immediately after the end of the pressure change, that means before the samples had relaxed at the new pressure. In the p-t-profile (Fig. 1) such a pair of points correspond to the endpoints of the plateau before the pressure change, and the first point on the plateau after the pressure change under consideration.

APC hetero-hexamers show a rather complex difference spectrum (Fig. 3c). There is a pronounced absorption increase between 655 and 690 nm and around 615 nm, which is within the limits of error proportional to the pressure increase. In addition, a decrease around 645 nm is observed which is pronounced only above 500 atm. This behaviour does not correspond to a simple change in aggregation, upon which a decrease around 650 and an increase around 620 nm is observed at ambient pressure (see [2]). It appears rather, that a red-shift of the 650 nm component is combined with an overall increase in absorption. The absorption changes recorded upon decreasing and increasing the pressure repetitively indicate a fully reversible spectral change (data not shown). These results demonstrate again the absence of any significant irreversible pressure effect in APC hetero-hexamers.

APC hetero-dimers show a monotonous absorption increase with increasing pressure ( $\approx 10\%/kbar$ ) around 635 nm, that is to the red of the ab-

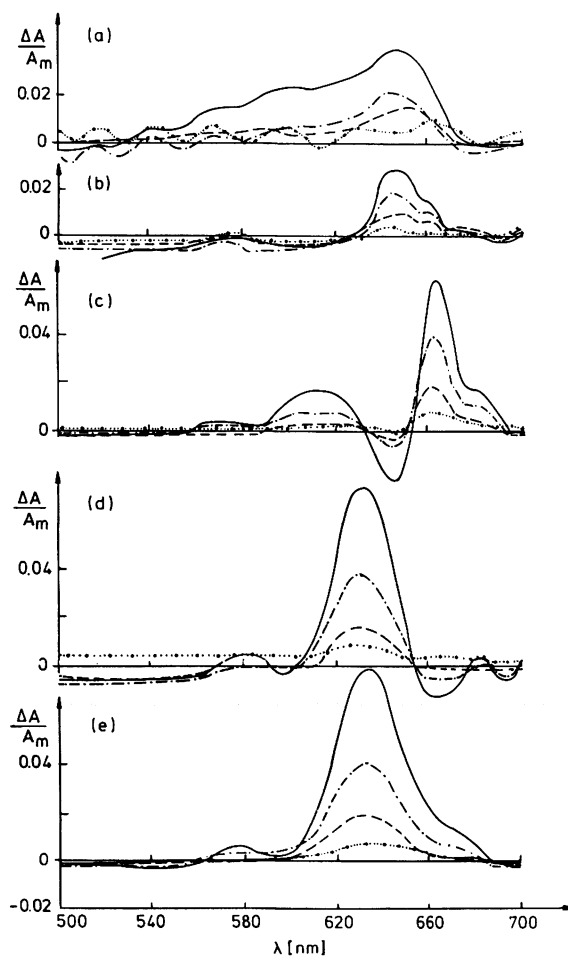


Fig. 3. Effects of increasing pressure on absorption spectra of a) PC hetero-hexamer, b) PC mix, c) APC hetero-hexamer, d) APC mix, e) APC hetero-dimer. Difference spectra at high (values below) *minus* low pressure (10 bar). High-pressure spectra were recorded immediately after reaching the respective setting. (••••) 10 → 100 bar; (---) 10 → 250 bar; (-·-·-) 10 → 500 bar; (—) 10 → 1000 bar.

sorption maximum (Fig. 3e). As can be seen from Fig. 2e, the change is completely reversible. The difference spectra resemble somewhat the difference spectra expected for aggregation, except that the maximum increase is around 635 nm and not at 650 nm. More likely is therefore that the origin of the absorption differences is (like in the hetero-hexamers) a general increase in absorption, combined with a red-shift of the maximum.

The response of PC hetero-hexamer to the initial pressure increase is small, and the noisy spectra do not give a well-defined trend (Fig. 3a). A similar small change is seen with the PC mix. Upon release of the pressure, the absorption of PC hetero-hexamer shows however a very large decrease (Fig. 4a) which contrasts at first glance with the many times smaller change upon pressure increase (Fig. 3a). Since the effect of increasing the pressure remains small also in the second cycle (see trace  $\bullet\text{---}\bullet$  in Fig. 4a), the different behavior seems to be related to the different rates at which the pressure changes. Due to experimental limita-

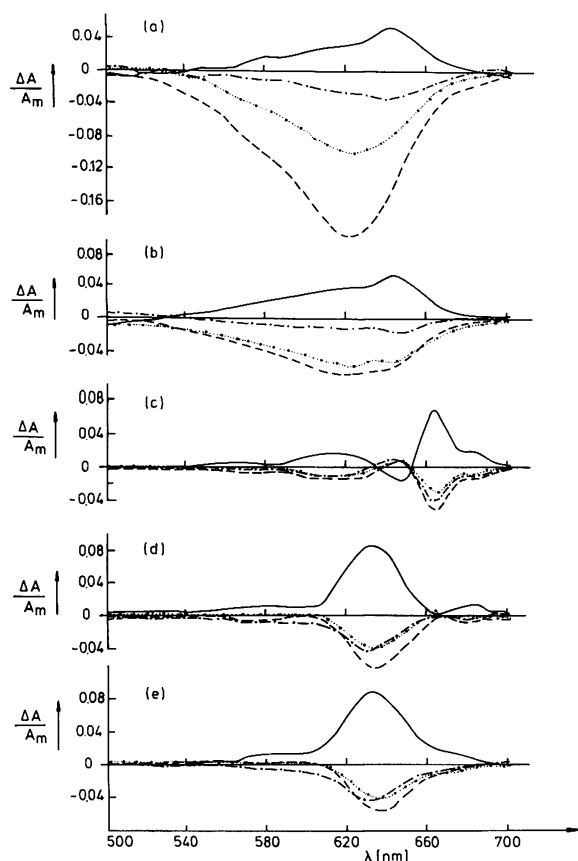


Fig. 4. Effects of decreasing and re-increasing pressure on absorption of PC a) hetero-hexamer, b) PC mix, c) APC hetero-hexamer, d) APC mix, e) APC hetero-dimer. Difference spectra (final *minus* starting) with pressures as indicated below. Starting spectra were measured after relaxation, the final ones immediately after reaching the set pressure. ( $\bullet\text{---}\bullet$ ) 1000  $\rightarrow$  500 bar; ( $\text{---}$ ) 1000  $\rightarrow$  250 bar; ( $\text{---}\cdot\text{---}$ ) 500  $\rightarrow$  10 bar; ( $\text{---}$ ) 10  $\rightarrow$  1000 bar.

tions, the pressure build-up occurs at a maximum speed of about 50 bar/min, whereas the decrease is as fast as 300 bar/min (Fig. 1). Consequently, any slow relaxation process following the pressure change should show-up much more clearly in that part of the cycle where the pressure changes rapidly.

Indeed, the existence of such a relaxation process is verified by the difference of spectra taken at constant pressure at various times after a large rapid pressure decrease (represented by a plateau in Fig. 1). The shapes of these difference spectra (Fig. 5) are similar to the difference spectra obtained as immediate effect of the rapid pressure decrease, but the sign of the change is opposite. That observation obviously shows that upon fast pressure release there is a significant rapid decrease in absorbance in PC.

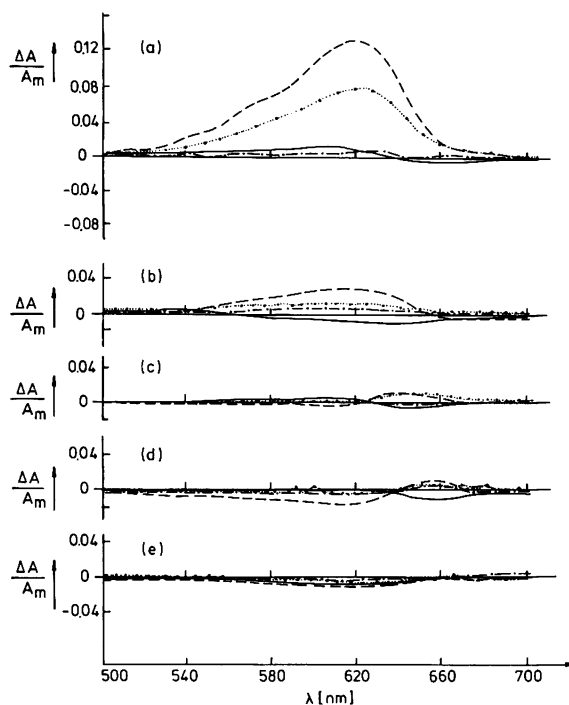


Fig. 5. Transient effects observed in absorption spectra after rapid pressure changes of a) PC hetero-hexamer, b) PC mix, c) APC hetero-hexamer, d) APC mix, e) APC hetero-dimer. The differences (relaxed *minus* unrelaxed) are between spectra which were taken immediately after reaching the final pressure given below and those recorded after some time of relaxation at this pressure. ( $\bullet\text{---}\bullet$ ) 1000  $\rightarrow$  500 bar; ( $\text{---}$ ) 1000  $\rightarrow$  250 bar; ( $\text{---}\cdot\text{---}$ ) 250  $\rightarrow$  10 bar; ( $\text{---}$ ) 10  $\rightarrow$  1000 bar.

Yet on a time scale of minutes, the protein-chromophore assembly relaxes into the pressure-adequate equilibrium. During this relaxation process, a part of the rapid absorbance decrease vanishes, such that the long-time net effect of the pressure decrease is rather small and essentially equal in size to the absorbance decrease observed upon a sufficiently slow pressure increase. Therefore, the absorption spectra are restored after passage through the complete pressure cycle (see Fig. 2). The relaxation effect is particularly pronounced for fast pressure changes above 250 bar. That no such relaxation is found after a slow pressure increase (dotted spectrum in Fig. 3) is not surprising in view of the above presented results.

This pronounced relaxation effect is found only in the PC hetero-hexamer. By comparison, the relaxation of APC hetero-hexamer is much smaller, the maximum effect (1000–250 bar) is in the range of 1% (Fig. 5c). A similar small effect is found for the PC-mix sample. It shows the same type of difference spectra as the hetero-hexamer, but with decreased amplitudes. This indicates a negligible effect in the PC hetero-dimer population of the sample. On the other hand, it proves in our opinion that the observed changes in the absorption spectra are not caused by a change in the hetero-dimer/hetero-hexamer ratio as a function of pressure, but rather due to intrinsic effects. In view of the results of X-ray analysis [9], and quantum-mechanical model calculations [19, 20], there are two possible sources to explain the spectral shifts.

According to our present understanding the absorption band profile is inhomogeneously broadened [22], the different contributions originating from various chromophore-protein arrangements. More precisely speaking, there exist different tautomeric forms of the amino-acid residues around the chromophore which, due to electrostatic interactions, give rise to a manifold of chromophore absorption bands. The external pressure change could now cause either a change in free enthalpy of the various chromophore-protein arrangements, thereby changing the statistical weights, with which each conformation contributes, or change the absorption characteristics of some of the statistically important conformations. The latter case seems likely in PC hetero-hexamer, because one knows that there is a strong coupling between the  $\alpha$ -84 and  $\beta$ -84 chromophores of neighbouring sub-

units, which is easily modified by linker peptides. Whichever processes happen in PC hetero-dimer and APC hetero-dimer or hetero-hexamer, they must be much faster or smaller than in PC hetero-hexamer.

#### Temperature effects

Since at present the origin of the absorption relaxation is unclear, one could principally argue that the rapid pressure decrease could lead to a temperature change, and temperature is known to have a pronounced effect on the absorption of PC from *Spirulina platensis* [21]. However, the apparatus is thermostated to within  $\pm 0.1$  °C and the *in situ* temperature measurement does not indicate any fluctuation larger than  $\pm 0.1$  °C (see Fig. 1). Moreover, there is a similar temperature effect expected for APC-samples, which has not been observed. Furthermore, in all samples the difference spectra upon pressure release were similar in shape and magnitude at 10 and 30 °C (not shown).

In a second set of experiments, the temperature was slowly increased from 10 to 30 °C at a pressure of 500 bar (this pressure was chosen, because the relaxation effect of PC was very small below 250 bar). The 20 °C temperature difference is considerably higher than any possible temperature variation in the samples during the previous experiments. With PC hetero-hexamer, there is an absorption decrease by 10% peaking around 623 nm, when measured immediately after reaching the final temperature (Fig. 6a, ---). This is partly reverted by a subsequent increase if the sample is kept under constant conditions (—●—●—), *i.e.*, there is a relaxation as well as a permanent effect. The remaining effect is complex, as indicated by the extrema in the difference spectrum for the relaxed samples (---). The absorption relaxation occurs again on a time scale of several minutes. The temperature induced changes in the PC-mix are also qualitatively different from the hetero-hexamer, in particular there is no second negative band at  $\approx 655$  nm.

None of the difference spectra between relaxed samples corresponds to known difference spectra obtained for changes of aggregation state. Although contributions from the latter cannot be excluded, they seem to play a minor role as concluded from a comparison of the results for heterohex-

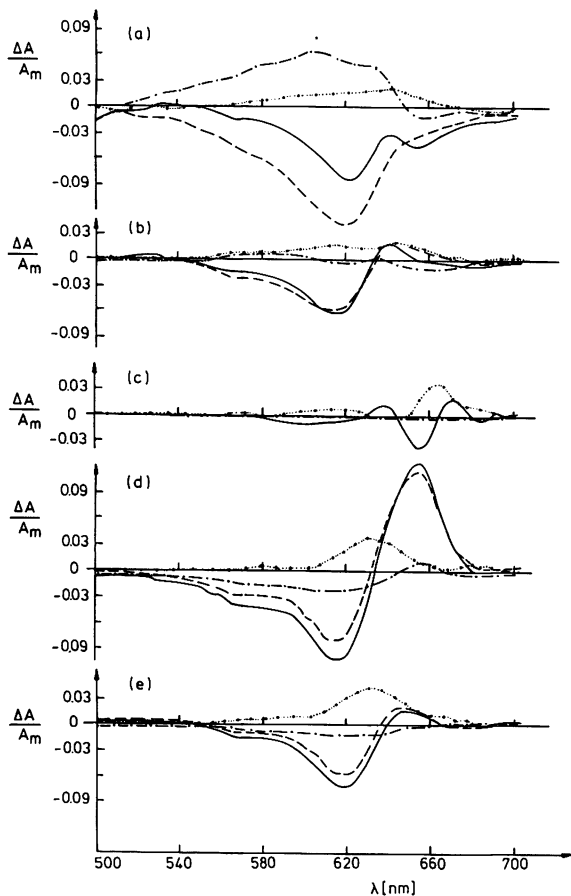


Fig. 6. Effects of increasing temperature at 500 bar with a) PC hetero-hexamer, b) PC mix, c) APC hetero-hexamer, d) APC mix, e) APC hetero-dimer. (••••): Difference spectra induced by a pressure increase from 10 to 500 bar at 10 °C (final *minus* start, no relaxation). (---): Difference spectra induced by temperature increase (10 to 30 °C, no relaxation) at 500 bar. (-·-·-): Difference spectra of the relaxation process after temperature increase from 10 to 30 °C at 500 bar (relaxed *minus* unrelaxed). (—): Persistent temperature effect on absorption, difference spectrum (30 °C, relaxed *minus* 10 °C, relaxed). In part 6c, the solid and the dashed traces are identical within the limits of error.

americ pigments, and those samples, which contain hetero-dimers and hetero-hexamers in equilibrium. The effect is always more pronounced in the PC hetero-hexamers which are away from equimolar equilibrium. The opposite would be expected, if the pressure and temperature effects were due to a change in aggregation. The data show at the same time that the hetero-hexamers are much

more susceptible to p/T changes, than are the hetero-dimers, which is most likely related to a change in the interaction between  $\alpha$ -84 and  $\beta$ -84 chromophores on adjacent hetero-dimers in the hetero-hexamer.

We conclude from this, that i) both the PC hetero-hexamer and the hetero-dimer spectra are temperature-dependent, ii) that the changes are different in these two states, and iii) that no conclusions can be presently drawn concerning any aggregation changes in the process.

In the case of APC hetero-hexamer, the temperature induced difference spectrum is similar to the pressure induced one, but of reversed sign, *e.g.* the 660 nm absorption difference is positive for pressure increase (Fig. 6), and negative for a temperature increase. Again this effect shows only little relaxation with time when the sample is kept under these conditions. The changes in the (partially) dissociated APC are different from the ones in the hetero-hexamer. In this case the highest amplitude is observed in the "APC-mix", indicating that it is (at least in part) related to a shift in the aggregation equilibrium. The s-shaped difference signal with extrema near the absorption maxima of the hetero-hexamer and hetero-dimer, respectively, supports this view. However, the relative amplitudes are different from a simple disaggregation as observed *e.g.* by addition of KSCN [15]. Again, the temperature-induced changes are qualitatively different from the pressure-induced ones, confirming that the latter are unrelated to any heating/cooling effect inadvertently induced by the pressure changes.

## Conclusion

One of the important technological aspects of this work is the fact that the biliproteins under study exhibit an immediate change in absorption spectra upon fast pressure or temperature changes. Since this initial change is followed by a relaxation phenomenon which occurs on the time scale of several minutes, the initial drastic changes can be disguised, if the whole spectrum is not recorded within a comparably short time. It is only because the present apparatus applies a diode array spectrometer in combination with optical multiplexing technique and fast data transfer and storage that the evolution of the spectral features can be fol-

lowed with, at least in the PC-samples, sufficient speed and accuracy (S/N-ratio). One must suspect that a fast response to pressure and temperature changes occurs in many more chromoproteins, than has been reported so far, just because the recording by the spectrometers was not sufficiently fast. *E.g.* the change in absorption of PC heterohexamers is significantly different when measured under quasistationary conditions than under pressure or temperature jump. The results further indicate that the effect of temperature and pressure jump are similar in spectral shape, but opposite in sign. APC and PC differ as such as the changes in PC seem to be transient in nature, that is they compensate when a temperature or pressure cycle is

completed. In contrast, APC shows less or no relaxation after change of  $p$  or  $T$ , and some of the induced changes are present after completion of the cycle indicating persistent changes in the sample induced by higher pressure or/and temperature.

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## Subject Index

## Original Communications and Notes

- ABA Transport  
Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes . . . . . 106
- Aberration Scoring  
Slit Scan Flow Cytometry of Isolated Chromosomes Following Fluorescence Hybridization: an Approach of Online Screening for Specific Chromosomes and Chromosome Translocations . . . . . 433
- Acetals  
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosafeners . . . . . 805  
Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of Acetal Compounds . . . . . 810
- Acetic Acid Esters of Secondary Alcohols  
Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana . . . . . 33
- Acetochlor  
Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Herbicides in Maize Seedlings . . . . . 828  
Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize . . . . . 836  
Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of *Phytophthora* spp. Fungi . . . . . 866
- Acetolactate Synthase (ALS)  
Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors . . . . . 945
- Acetylcholinesterase  
Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans* . . . . . 1089
- Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase  
Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlorimid on Lipid Synthesis and Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum . . . . . 934
- Acid Soil Stress  
Oxabetrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress . . . . . 950
- Acifluorfen  
Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a *Nicotiana tabacum* L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance . . . . . 875
- Actin  
Product Release is Not the Rate-Limiting Step during Cytochalasin B-Induced ATPase Activity of Monomeric Actin . . . . . 139
- Action Potential  
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture . . . . . 687
- Adaptation  
Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium . . . . . 461
- ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase  
Plant ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase – Recent Advances and Biotechnological Perspectives (*A Review*) . . . . . 605
- Aggregation Effects  
UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus* . . . . . 717
- Air Pollutants  
Ascorbic Acid as Indicator of Damage to Forest. A Correlation with Air Quality . . . . . 67  
Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions (N) . . . . . 502
- Alkaloid  
Further Studies of Sequestration of Alkaloids in *Papaver somniferum* L. Latex Vacuoles . . . . . 377  
*Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Teline monspessulana* . . . . . 1080
- Alk(en)ylresorcinols  
Calorimetric Study on the Interactions of 5-*n*-Heptadec(en)ylresorcinols from Cereal Grains with Zwitterionic Phospholipid (DPPC) . . . . . 423
- Alnus koehnei*  
Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae (N) . . . . . 495
- Aloe lateritia* ENGLER  
A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers . . . . . 177
- Alternative Nitrogenases  
The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 217
- Amino Acids Properties  
On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis . . . . . 305
- 1-Aminobenzotriazole  
Effect of a Safener Towards Thiocarbamates on Plant Lipid Metabolism . . . . . 931
- AMV  
Podocypic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podocypa* species . . . . . 442

- Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301  
Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration . . . . . 1024
- Anal Sac Secretion  
Dimethylthioliolanes in the Anal Sac Secretion of the Weasel, *Mustela nivalis* (N) . . . . . 166
- Antagonism  
Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases . . . . . 915  
Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants . . . . . 957
- Anthelmintic Activity  
Studies in Enteric Anthelmintics: Activity Profile of Prodrug of a Bisbenzimidazole . . . . . 673
- Anthraquinones  
On the Chemistry of the Lichen Genus *Lasallia* M rat . . . . . 19
- Anthrones  
A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers . . . . . 177
- Antibiotic  
Podocypic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podocypa* species  
Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of *Lentinellus omphalodes* . . . . . 989
- Antiestrogen  
Synthesis and Biological Behavior of a Boronated Analogue of the Antiestrogen U 23,469-M . . . . . 252
- anti-HLA Antibodies  
Partial Characterization of anti-HLA Class II Antibodies Isolated by Aid of Sepharose-Peptide Immunoabsorbents (N) . . . . . 321
- Antioxidant Systems  
Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a *Nicotiana tabacum* L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance . . . . . 875
- Arborization  
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture . . . . . 687
- Arginine Metabolism  
Induction of Nitrate Reductase Activity by Arginine in the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 591
- Artemia*  
N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases of the Brine Shrimp *Artemia*: Partial Purification and Characterization . . . . . 781
- Aryloxyphenoxypropanoate Herbicide  
Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropanoate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 . . . . . 901
- Arylphorin  
Incorporation of a *Calliphora* Arylphorin Gene into the Germ Line of *Drosophila* by P-Element-Mediated Transformation . . . . . 145
- Ascochyta rabiei*  
Characterization of Pectic Enzymes from the Chickpea Pathogen *Ascochyta rabiei* . . . . . 51
- Ascorbate Peroxidase  
Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O<sub>2</sub>- and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured *via* Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching . . . . . 635
- Ascorbic Acid Radical  
Ascorbic Acid as Indicator of Damage to Forest. A Correlation with Air Quality . . . . . 67
- Aspergillus*  
Significance of the Non-Oxidative Pentose Phosphate Pathway in *Aspergillus oryzae* Grown on Different Carbon Sources . . . . . 223
- Aspergillus flavus*  
Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids . . . . . 341
- Association  
Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver . . . . . 1101
- ATP-Hydrolysis  
On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase . . . . . 71
- ATPase  
On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase . . . . . 71
- V-ATPase  
Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum* . . . . . 613
- ATPase Activity  
Product Release is Not the Rate-Limiting Step during Cytochalasin B-Induced ATPase Activity of Monomeric Actin . . . . . 139
- Attractant  
Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.) . . . . . 264
- Azide Inhibition  
Effect of Azide on the ATPase Activity of Isolated CF<sub>1</sub> . . . . . 621
- Bacterial Sensors  
Are Bacterial Sensory Systems Models for Phytochrome Action? Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis of the Phytochrome Module Related to Bacterial Transmitter Modules . . . . . 750
- Bacteriochlorophyll *c*  
Resonance Raman Spectroscopic Evidence for the Identity of the Bacteriochlorophyll *c* Organization in Protein-Free and Protein-Containing Chlorosomes from *Chloroflexus aurantiacus* . . . . . 228
- Banana  
Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana . . . . . 33



- Basidiomycetes  
 Lepistirones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina) . . . . . 169  
 Podoscyphic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podoscypha* species . . . . . 442  
 Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of *Lentinellus omphalodes* . . . . . 989
- Be<sup>2+</sup> Stress  
 The Formation of Hydroxylated Phenazines by *Pseudomonas fluorescens* Y<sub>4</sub> upon Addition of Be<sup>2+</sup> to the Culture Medium – a Defense Mechanism? . . . . . 194
- Beet Spinach (*Beta vulgaris*)  
 Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes . . . . . 87
- Benoxacor  
 Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn . . . . . 846
- Bensulfuron Methyl  
 Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiolcarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity . . . . . 887
- Benzoquinone Derivative  
 Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of *Lentinellus omphalodes* . . . . . 989
- Betula nigra*  
 Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae (N) . . . . . 495
- Bifunctional Coupling Reagent  
 Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent (N) . . . . . 498
- Biochemical Kinetics  
 Phenotypic Traits and Regulatory Role of RNA Folding in Molecular Selection . . . . . 656
- Biogenesis  
 On the Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophor of the Pyoverdins . . . . . 398  
 Ferribactins – the Biogenetic Precursors of Pyoverdins . . . . . 527
- Biogenic Amines  
 Biogenic Amine Levels in the Haemolymph of the Cabbage Armyworm Larvae (*Mamestra brassicae*) Following Injection of Octopamine Insecticides . . . . . 127
- Biosurfactants  
 Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Biosurfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea . . . . . 197  
 Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK 1 . . . . . 204  
 Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants . . . . . 210
- Biosynthesis  
 Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid . . . . . 364  
 Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth. *o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity . . . . . 585
- Bipyridyles  
 Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose . . . . . 428
- Bisabolane Derivatives  
 Lepistirones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina) . . . . . 169
- Bisabolanoid  
 Novel Bisabolanoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 349  
 Highly Oxygenated Bisabolanoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 357
- Bisbenzimidazole  
 Studies in Enteric Anthelmintics: Activity Profile of Prodrug of a Bisbenzimidazole . . . . . 673
- Bisdehydrolycopene  
 Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenenes . . . . . 1045
- Blue-Light Photoreceptor  
 Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata* . . . . . 542
- Boron  
 Synthesis and Biological Behavior of a Boronated Analogue of the Antiestrogen U 23,469-M . . . . . 252
- Botrytis cinerea*  
 Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids . . . . . 341  
 Biotransformation of  $\beta$ -Damascone by *Botrytis cinerea* . . . . . 395
- Brain  
 Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain (N) . . . . . 1134
- Branched Alcohols  
 Composition of the Surface Lipids from the European Mole (*Talpa europaea*) . . . . . 122
- Branched Fatty Acids  
 Composition of the Surface Lipids from the European Mole (*Talpa europaea*) . . . . . 122
- Bromus erectus*  
 Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition . . . . . 569
- Bud Exudates  
 Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae (N) . . . . . 495
- Cacalol and Its Derivatives  
 Inhibition of Oxygen Evolution by Cacalol and Its Derivatives . . . . . 777
- Calcium Transport ATPase  
 The Modulation of the Calcium Transport by Skeletal Muscle Sarcoplasmic Reticulum in the Hibernating European Hamster . . . . . 1109

- Calliphora*  
Incorporation of a *Calliphora* Arylphorin Gene into the Germ Line of *Drosophila* by P-Element-Mediated Transformation . . . . . 145
- Callus Culture  
Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia* . . . . . 172
- Cancer Cells  
Growth Inhibitions on Human Cancer Cell Cultures with the Indole Sulphur-Containing Phytoalexins and Their Analogues (N) . . . . . 706
- Carbohydrate Metabolism  
Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*) . . . . . 597
- Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds  
Specific Crystal Chemical Interactions between Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds and Cholesterol . . . . . 663
- ζ-Carotene  
Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenes . . . 1045
- Carrier  
*Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Teline monspessulana* . . . . . 1080
- Carthamin Formation  
Acceleration of Enzyme-Dependent Carthamin Formation by Manganese with Diversed Valence States . . . . . 1011
- Carthamus tinctorius*  
Acceleration of Enzyme-Dependent Carthamin Formation by Manganese with Diversed Valence States . . . . . 1011
- Cataract  
Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. I. Studies on the Redox Properties of Bovine Lens Proteins . . . . . 280  
Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. II. Mechanism of Hydrogenperoxide Formation and Inhibition by Iodide . . . . . 285
- CD-Spectroscopy  
Subunit δ of Chloroplast F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy . . . . . 759
- Celastraceae  
UDP-D-Xylose: Flavonol 3-O-Xylosyltransferase from Young Leaves of *Euonymus alatus* f. *ciliato-dentatus* . . . . . 1003
- Cell Culture  
Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpan Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.)  
Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase . . . . . 43  
Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*) . . . . . 597  
Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of *Lupinus polyphyllus* and *Lupinus hartwegii* . . . . . 725
- Cell Line  
Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans* . . . . . 1089
- Cell Suspension Culture  
Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth. . . . . 371
- Cell Uptake  
Synthesis and Biological Behavior of a Boronated Analogue of the Antiestrogen U 23,469-M . . . . . 252
- CF<sub>1</sub>  
Subunit δ of Chloroplast F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy . . . . . 759
- CGA-136872  
Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonylurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides . . . 939
- CGA-154281  
Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Non-treated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots . . . . . 850
- Characterization  
UDP-D-Xylose: Flavonol 3-O-Xylosyltransferase from Young Leaves of *Euonymus alatus* f. *ciliato-dentatus* . . . . . 1003
- Cheilanthes argentea*  
New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilanthoid Ferns . . . . . 325
- Chemical Properties  
Chemistry and Structure-Activity Relationships of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 798
- Chemical Selectivity  
Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize . . . . . 836
- Chemotaxis  
Directed Cell Movement with Steric Exclusion . . . . . 697
- Chiasma clathrata*  
Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) . . . . . 257
- Chickpea  
Characterization of Pectic Enzymes from the Chickpea Pathogen *Ascochyta rabiei* . . . . . 51
- Chiral Flavour Compounds  
Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana . . . . . 33
- Chironomus*  
Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans* . . . . . 1089
- Chloramphenicol  
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. XI. Interactions with Chloramphenicol . . . . . 647
- Chlorella kessleri*  
Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate Kinase from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties . . . 416
- Chloroacetamides  
Milestones in the Development of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 794  
Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize . . . . . 856

- Chloroflexus aurantiacus*  
Resonance Raman Spectroscopic Evidence for the Identity of the Bacteriochlorophyll *c* Organization in Protein-Free and Protein-Containing Chlorosomes from *Chloroflexus aurantiacus* . . . . . 228
- Chlorophyll  
Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition . . . . . 569
- Chlorophyll Fluorescence  
Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O<sub>2</sub>- and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured via Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching . . . . . 635
- Chlorophyll Synthesis  
Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata* . . . . . 542
- Chloroplast  
On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase . . . . . 71  
Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation . . . . . 79  
Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein . . . . . 575
- Chloroplast-ATPase (CF<sub>1</sub>)  
Effect of Azide on the ATPase Activity of Isolated CF<sub>1</sub> . . . . . 621
- Chlorosome  
Resonance Raman Spectroscopic Evidence for the Identity of the Bacteriochlorophyll *c* Organization in Protein-Free and Protein-Containing Chlorosomes from *Chloroflexus aurantiacus* . . . . . 228
- Chlortetracycline Hydrochloride  
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. X. Interactions with Chlortetracycline Hydrochloride . . . . . 133
- Cholesterol  
Specific Crystal Chemical Interactions between Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds and Cholesterol . . . . . 663
- Cholinesterase  
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O). For Example: Human Cholinesterase . . . . . 789
- Chromatographic Techniques  
Biotransformation of β-Damascone by *Botrytis cinerea* . . . . . 395
- Chromones  
A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers . . . . . 177
- Cicer arietinum*  
Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpin Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase . . . . . 43
- Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures of Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and Their Involvement in Pterocarpin Phytoalexin Biosynthesis . . . . . 58
- Ciona intestinalis*  
Teratogenic and Metamorphosis-Inhibiting Activity of Retinoic Acid in *Ciona intestinalis* . . . . . 1094
- Cistus laurifolius*  
UV Radiation Dependent Flavonoid Accumulation of *Cistus laurifolius* L. . . . . 37
- Citric Acid Cycle  
On the Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophore of the Pyoverdins . . . . . 398
- Cladina macaronesica*  
Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladina macaronesica* . . . . . 12
- Cladoniaceae  
Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladina macaronesica* . . . . . 12
- Clopyralid  
Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants . . . . . 957
- Coevolution  
On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis . . . . . 305
- ColE1-Related Plasmids  
Replication of ColE1-Related Plasmids at Increased Growth Temperature in Dependence on the Rom Function . . . . . 1063
- Coleus blumei*  
Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth. . . . . 371
- Combinations  
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O). For Example: Human Cholinesterase . . . . . 789
- Comparative Efficacy  
Studies in Enteric Anthelmintics: Activity Profile of Prodrug of a Bisbenzimidazole . . . . . 673
- Copper  
Haemocyanin Synthesis in the Crayfish, *Astacus leptodactylus*: *in vitro* Production by the Midgut Gland after Addition of Oxygen Binding Modulators and Exogenous Copper . . . . . 163
- Corn  
Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn . . . . . 846
- Corn (*Zea mays* L.)  
Dithiocarbamate Derivatives as Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 815
- Coupled On-Line Capillary Gas
- Coumaranochroman-4-ones  
Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood . . . . . 331
- Covalent Modification  
On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase . . . . . 71  
Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent (N) . . . . . 498

- CPMAS  
Quantitative Characterization of Soil Organic Matter and Its Fractionation Products by Solid State High Resolution C-13 (CPMAS) Spectroscopy . . . . . 982
- Crayfish  
Haemocyanin Synthesis in the Crayfish, *Astacus leptodactylus*: *in vitro* Production by the Midgut Gland after Addition of Oxygen Binding Modulators and Exogenous Copper . . . 163
- Crotalaria ochroleuca*  
Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects . . . 579
- Crown-Ether  
Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes . . . . . 87
- Cruciferae  
Growth Inhibitions on Human Cancer Cell Cultures with the Indole Sulphur-Containing Phytoalexins and Their Analogues (N) . . . 706
- Cultured Cells  
Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors . . . . . 563
- Cyanoacrylate  
X-Ray Structure Analysis of a Cyanoacrylate Inhibitor of Photosystem II Electron Transport . . . . . 93
- Cyanobacteria  
The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . 217  
Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration . . . . 1024
- Cyclic Acetals  
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer *Eldana saccharina* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) . . . . . 678
- Cytisine  
*Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Telina monspessulana* . . . . . 1080
- Cytochrome P-450  
Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize . . . . . 897  
Influence of Safeners on the *in vivo* and *in vitro* Metabolism of Bentazon and Metolachlor by Grain Sorghum Shoots: a Preliminary Report . . . . . 906
- Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases  
Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures of Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and Their Involvement in Pterocarpin Phytoalexin Biosynthesis . . . . . 58
- Cytoplasmic pH  
Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes . . . . . 106
- D1 Polypeptide  
A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition . . . . . 557
- D1 Protein  
Turnover of the D1 Reaction Center Polypeptide from Photosystem II in Intact Spruce Needles and Spinach Leaves . . . . . 245  
Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein . . . . . 575  
Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II . . . . . 765
- D2 Protein  
Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II . . . . . 765
- Damage to Forest  
Ascorbic Acid as Indicator of Damage to Forest. A Correlation with Air Quality . . . . . 67
- $\beta$ -Damascone Biotransformation  
Biotransformation of  $\beta$ -Damascone by *Botrytis cinerea* . . . . . 395
- Darmstoff  
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer *Eldana saccharina* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) . . . . . 678
- Decrease of Caffeine  
Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation . . . . . 1067
- Depsides  
On the Chemistry of the Lichen Genus *Lasallia* M $\acute{e}$ rat . . . . . 19
- Desmarestia aculeata*  
Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata* . . . . . 542
- 1,6-Di-O-galloyl- $\beta$ -D-glucopyranose  
Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose . . . . . 389
- Diallate  
Effect of a Safener Towards Thiocarbamates on Plant Lipid Metabolism . . . . . 931
- Dibucaine  
Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation . . . . . 79
- Dichlormid  
Milestones in the Development of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 794  
Effect of the Safener Dichlormid on Maize Peroxygenase and Lipoxigenase . . . . . 920  
Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots . . . . . 926  
Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlormid on Lipid Synthesis and Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum . . . . . 934
- Dichloroacetamide Safeners  
Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize . . . . . 856

- Dihydroquinolinones  
Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes . . . . . 549
- Dimepiperate  
Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiocarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity . . . . . 887
- Dimethyldithiolanes  
Dimethyldithiolanes in the Anal Sac Secretion of the Weasel, *Mustela nivalis* (N) . . . . . 166
- Diquat  
Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose . . . . . 428
- Disaccharides  
Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions . . . . . 313
- Dithiocarbamates  
Dithiocarbamate Derivatives as Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 815
- Diuron Adaptation  
Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition . . . . . 569
- Divalent Cation Specificity  
Effect of Azide on the ATPase Activity of Isolated CF<sub>1</sub> . . . . . 621
- Diversed Valence State  
Acceleration of Enzyme-Dependent Carthamin Formation by Manganese with Diversed Valence States . . . . . 1011
- Drosophila rosy*<sup>506</sup>  
Incorporation of a *Calliphora* Arylphorin Gene into the Germ Line of *Drosophila* by P-Element-Mediated Transformation . . . . . 145
- Dung Beetle  
Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachlomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis* . . . . . 1073
- Ecdysteroid  
Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans* . . . . . 1089
- Eldana saccharina*  
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer *Eldana saccharina* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) . . . . . 678
- Electrical Parameters  
Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments . . . . . 487
- Electroantennographic Detection  
Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachlomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis* . . . . . 1073
- Electron Transport  
Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes . . . . . 87
- Electrophysiology  
Electrogenic Na<sup>+</sup>-Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors . . . . . 451
- Elicitor  
Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpan Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase . . . . . 43
- Emulsifier  
Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Biosurfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea . . . . . 197
- Enantioselective MDGC  
Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana . . . . . 33
- Energy Dependent Quenching  
Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O<sub>2</sub>- and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured *via* Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching . . . . . 635
- Enumeration of Viable Cells  
A Simple Method for Counting Small Numbers of Cells by Flow Cytometry (N) . . . . . 1130
- Enzyme (Ca<sup>2+</sup>, Mg<sup>2+</sup>) ATPase (EC 3.6.1.38)  
Monosaccharides and Disaccharides Decrease the K<sub>m</sub> for Phosphorylation of a Membrane-Bound Enzyme ATPase . . . . . 644
- Enzyme Regulation  
Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties . . . . . 416
- Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*) . . . . . 597
- Epicuticular Wax Composition  
Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. . . . . 743
- Epitaxial Adsorption  
Specific Crystal Chemical Interactions between Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds and Cholesterol . . . . . 663
- Epoxyheptadecadiene  
Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) . . . . . 257
- EPR *in vivo*  
Ascorbic Acid as Indicator of Damage to Forest. A Correlation with Air Quality . . . . . 67
- EPTC  
Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize . . . . . 836
- Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots . . . . . 926

- EPTC Sulfoxidation  
Effect of the Safener Dichlormid on Maize Peroxygenase and Lipoxygenase . . . . . 920
- Erythrocyte Membrane  
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. XI. Interactions with Chloramphenicol . . . . . 647
- Ethylene  
Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants . . . . . 957
- Euonymus*  
UDP-D-Xylose: Flavonol 3-O-Xylosyltransferase from Young Leaves of *Euonymus alatus* f. *ciliato-dentatus* . . . . . 1003
- European Hamster  
The Modulation of the Calcium Transport by Skeletal Muscle Sarcoplasmic Reticulum in the Hibernating European Hamster . . . . . 1109
- European Mole  
Composition of the Surface Lipids from the European Mole (*Talpa europaea*) . . . . . 122
- Evolution  
Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum* . . . . . 613
- Na<sup>+</sup>-Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchange  
Electrogenic Na<sup>+</sup>-Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors . . . . . 451
- Exoperoxide  
Highly Oxygenated Bisabolanoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 357
- Facilitation  
Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium . . . . . 461
- FACS  
A Simple Method for Counting Small Numbers of Cells by Flow Cytometry (N) . . . . . 1130
- Farinose Frond Exudate  
New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida* . . . . . 507
- Fat Body  
Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones . . . . . 149
- Fatty Acid Elongation  
Effect of a Safener Towards Thiocarbamates on Plant Lipid Metabolism . . . . . 931
- Fatty Acids  
Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots . . . . . 926
- Fenclorim  
Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice . . . . . 861
- Ferredoxin  
Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts . . . . . 233
- Ferribactins  
Ferribactins - the Biogenetic Precursors of Pyoverdins . . . . . 527
- Filamentous Cyanobacterium  
Induction of Nitrate Reductase Activity by Arginine in the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 591  
Mass Spectrometric Analysis of N<sub>2</sub>-Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 629
- First-Passage Time  
Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors . . . . . 291
- Flavone  
Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids . . . . . 341
- Flavonoid Aglycones  
Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae (N) . . . . . 495
- Flavonoids  
UV Radiation Dependent Flavonoid Accumulation of *Cistus laurifolius* L. . . . . 37
- Flavonol  
UDP-D-Xylose: Flavonol 3-O-Xylosyltransferase from Young Leaves of *Euonymus alatus* f. *ciliato-dentatus* . . . . . 1003
- Fluorescence  
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture . . . . . 687  
Fluorescence *in situ* Hybridization in Suspension Slit Scan Flow Cytometry of Isolated Chromosomes Following Fluorescence Hybridization: an Approach of Online Screening for Specific Chromosomes and Chromosome Translocations . . . . . 433  
Fluorescence Quantum Yields  
Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes . . . . . 549
- Fluorescent Microspheres  
A Simple Method for Counting Small Numbers of Cells by Flow Cytometry (N) . . . . . 1130
- Fly  
Electrogenic Na<sup>+</sup>-Ca<sup>2+</sup> Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors . . . . . 451
- Forest Decline  
Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions (N) . . . . . 502
- Formononetin 7-O-glucoside-6"-O-malonate  
Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpan Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase . . . . . 43

- FPLC Superose 6 Separation  
Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate Kinase from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties . . . . . 416
- Fungal Development  
Significance of the Non-Oxidative Pentose Phosphate Pathway in *Aspergillus oryzae* Grown on Different Carbon Sources . . . . . 223
- Fungal Metabolism  
Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids . . . . . 341
- Fungal Sesquiterpenes  
Lepistrones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina) . . . . . 169
- Galium* spec.  
Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid . . . . . 364
- Gallotannin Biosynthesis  
Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose . . . . . 389
- Galloyltransferase  
Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose . . . . . 389
- Galvanotaxis  
Directed Cell Movement with Steric Exclusion . . . . . 697
- GC-MS  
Identification by Gas-Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis . . . . . 111  
Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus* . . . . . 519
- Gelidium latifolium*  
Occurrence of Jasmonic Acid in the Red Alga *Gelidium latifolium* (N) . . . . . 1127
- ertI* Gene  
Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenenes . . . . . 1045
- Gene Duplication  
Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum* . . . . . 613
- Gene Expression  
Plant ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase – Recent Advances and Biotechnological Perspectives (*A Review*) . . . . . 605
- Genetic Code Theories  
On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis . . . . . 305
- Genetic Complementation  
Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenenes . . . . . 1045
- Geosmin  
Occurrence of (-)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphogyna brongniartii* . . . . . 183
- Glass Transition  
Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions . . . . . 313
- $\beta$ -Glucogallin (1-O-galloyl- $\beta$ -D-glucopyranose)  
Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose . . . . . 389
- Glucosinolate  
Time-Course Studies of Phytoalexins and Glucosinolates in UV-Irradiated Turnip Tissue . . . . . 189
- Glucosyltransferase  
The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn . . . . . 882
- Glutathione  
Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Herbicides in Maize Seedlings . . . . . 828  
Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn . . . . . 846  
Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Non-Treated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots . . . . . 850  
Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice . . . . . 861  
Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of *Phytophthora* spp. Fungi . . . . . 866
- Glutathione Reductase  
The Inhibition of Glutathione Reductase by Quinones (N) . . . . . 966
- Glutathione S-Transferase  
Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn . . . . . 846  
Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Non-treated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots . . . . . 850  
Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of *Phytophthora* spp. Fungi . . . . . 866  
The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn . . . . . 882
- Glycerolipids  
Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition . . . . . 569
- Glycine*  
Accumulation of the Phytoalexin Glyceollin I in Soybean Nodules Infected by a *Bradyrhizobium japonicum nifA* Mutant (N) . . . . . 318
- Glycogen Phosphorylase  
Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones . . . . . 149
- Glycolipids  
Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Bio-

- surfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea . . . 197
- Glycosyl Conjugation  
Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropionate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 . . . . . 901
- Grain Sorghum  
Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlormid on Lipid Synthesis and Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum . . . . . 934
- Green-Light Photoreceptor  
Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata* . . . . . 542
- Growth Inhibition  
Growth Inhibitions on Human Cancer Cell Cultures with the Indole Sulphur-Containing Phytoalexins and Their Analogues (N) . . . . 706
- Guard Cells  
Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes . . . . . 106
- Haemocyanin Synthesis  
Haemocyanin Synthesis in the Crayfish, *Astacus leptodactylus*: *in vitro* Production by the Midgut Gland after Addition of Oxygen Binding Modulators and Exogenous Copper . . . 163
- Hairy Roots  
Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus* . . . . . 519
- Hairy Root Cultures  
Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of *Lupinus polyphyllus* and *Lupinus hartwegii* . . . . . 725  
Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of *Lupinus* – a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures . . . . . 735
- Heavy Water  
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O). For Example: Human Cholinesterase . . . . . 789
- Hemiptera  
Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.) . . . 264
- Hepaticae  
Occurrence of (–)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphyogyna brongniartii* . . . . . 183
- Herbicide Antidotes  
Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize . . . . . 856
- Herbicide Binding Site  
A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition . . . . . 557
- Herbicide Detoxification  
Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize . . . . . 856
- Herbicide Metabolism  
Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize . . . . . 897  
Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropionate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 . . . . . 901
- Herbicide Resistance  
Long-Term Effect of Diuron on Chlorophyllous Callus of *Bromus erectus*: Lipid Composition . . . . . 569
- Herbicide Safeners  
Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of Acetal Compounds . . . . . 810  
Dithiocarbamate Derivatives as Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 815  
Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Herbicides in Maize Seedlings . . . . . 828
- Herbicides  
Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein . . . . . 575  
Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of Acetal Compounds . . . . . 810  
An Overview of the Mechanisms of Action of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 819  
The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn . . . . . 882
- (E)-2-Hexenal  
Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.) . . . 264
- Hibernation  
The Modulation of the Calcium Transport by Skeletal Muscle Sarcoplasmic Reticulum in the Hibernating European Hamster . . . . 1109
- High-Pressure Spectroscopy  
UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus* . . . . . 717
- Hill Inhibitor  
X-Ray Structure Analysis of a Cyanoacrylate Inhibitor of Photosystem II Electron Transport . . . . . 93
- Hill Reaction  
Inhibition of Oxygen Evolution by Cacalol and Its Derivatives . . . . . 777
- Histocompatibility Antigens  
Partial Characterization of anti-HLA Class II Antibodies Isolated by Aid of Sepharose-Peptide Immunoabsorbents (N) . . . . . 321
- Homonataloins A and B  
A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers . . . . . 177
- Human Serum Albumin  
Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose . . . . . 428
- Humic Material  
Quantitative Characterization of Soil Organic Matter and Its Fractionation Products by



- Solid State High Resolution C-13 (CPMAS) Spectroscopy . . . . . 982
- Hydrocarbons
- Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK 1 . . . . . 204
- Hydrogen Peroxide
- Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. II. Mechanism of Hydrogen Peroxide Formation and Inhibition by Iodide . . . . . 285
- The Effect of Activated Oxygen Species on Nitrogenase of *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 407
- Mass Spectrometric Analysis of N<sub>2</sub>-Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 629
- Hydrolysis
- Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of Acetal Compounds . . . . . 810
- Hydroperoxide-Dependent Oxygenase
- Effect of the Safener Dichlormid on Maize Peroxygenase and Lipxygenase . . . . . 920
- Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis
- Are Bacterial Sensory Systems Models for Phytochrome Action? Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis of the Phytochrome Module Related to Bacterial Transmitter Modules . . . . . 750
- Hydroxylamine
- The Flash Pattern of Photosynthetic Oxygen Evolution after Treatment with Low Concentrations of Hydroxylamine as a Function of the Previous S<sub>1</sub>S<sub>0</sub>-Ratio Further Evidence that NH<sub>2</sub>OH Reduces the Water Oxidizing Complex in the Dark . . . . . 1033
- Hyoscyamus albus*
- Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus* . . . . . 519
- Hyperactivity
- Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation . . . . . 1067
- Hypergeometric Distribution
- On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis . . . . . 305
- Hypersensitive Response
- Accumulation of the Phytoalexin Glyceollin I in Soybean Nodules Infected by a *Bradyrhizobium japonicum nifA* Mutant (N) . . . . . 318
- Identification
- Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) . . . . . 257
- Imazapyr
- Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonylurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides . . . . . 939
- Imazaquin
- Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonylurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides . . . . . 939
- Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors . . . . . 945
- Imazethapyr
- Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize . . . . . 897
- Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonylurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides . . . . . 939
- Imidazolinone
- Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr . . . . . 893
- in vitro* Culture
- Growth and Secondary Product Formation of *in vitro* Cultures from the Liverwort *Reboulia hemisphaerica* . . . . . 28
- Occurrence of (-)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphygyna brongniartii* . . . . . 183
- Induction
- Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases . . . . . 915
- Induction of Nitrate Reductase
- Induction of Nitrate Reductase Activity by Arginine in the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 591
- Inhibition
- The Inhibition of Glutathione Reductase by Quinones (N) . . . . . 966
- Inhibition of Oxygen Evolution
- Inhibition of Oxygen Evolution by Cacalol and Its Derivatives . . . . . 777
- Inhibitor
- Podoscyphic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podoscypha* Species . . . . . 442
- Insect
- Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain (N) 1134
- Insect Attractant
- Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachlomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis* . . . . . 1073
- Insect Stress
- Biogenic Amine Levels in the Haemolymph of the Cabbage Armyworm Larvae (*Mamestra brassicae*) Following Injection of Octopaminergic Insecticides . . . . . 127
- Intron-Exon Boundaries
- Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum* . . . . . 613
- Iodide
- Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. II. Mechanism of Hydrogenperoxide Formation and Inhibition by Iodide . . . . . 285
- Iridoids
- Iridoid Glucosides from *Plantago altissima* L., *Plantago lanceolata* L., *Plantago atrata* Hoppe and *Plantago argentea* Chaix. (N) . . . . . 963
- Iridoids from *Plantago carinata* Schrad. . . . . 1001
- Iron-Nitrogenase
- The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 217

- Isochorismic Acid  
Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid . . . . . 364
- Isoenzymes  
N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases of the Brine Shrimp *Artemia*: Partial Purification and Characterization . . . . . 781
- Isoflavone Glucosides  
Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of *Lupinus polyphyllus* and *Lupinus hartwegii* . . . . . 725
- Isoflavonoids  
Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood . . . . . 331  
New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin (*Lupinus albus* L.) . . . . . 513  
Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of *Lupinus* - a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures . . . . . 735
- Isoprenoid Synthesis  
Oxabetrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress . . . . . 950
- 2-Isopropyl-3-methoxypyrazine  
Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects . . . . . 579
- Jasmonic Acid  
Occurrence of Jasmonic Acid in the Red Alga *Gelidium latifolium* (N) . . . . . 1127
- Ketals  
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosaferens . . . . . 805
- Kinetics  
N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases of the Brine Shrimp *Artemia*: Partial Purification and Characterization . . . . . 781
- Lamiaceae  
Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth. . . . . 371
- Lasallia*  
On the Chemistry of the Lichen Genus *Lasallia* Mérat . . . . . 19
- Latency  
Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors . . . . . 291
- Latec Vacuoles  
Further Studies of Sequestration of Alkaloids in *Papaver somniferum* L. Latex Vacuoles . . . . . 377
- Lavender Oil  
Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation . . . . . 1067
- Leech  
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture . . . . . 687
- Leguminosae  
Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood . . . . . 331  
New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin (*Lupinus albus* L.) . . . . . 513
- Lehmannin  
Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia* . . . . . 172
- Lentinellus omphalodes*  
Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of *Lentinellus omphalodes* . . . . . 989
- Lepidium sativum* L.  
The Greening Process in Cress Seedlings. III. Age-Dependent Changes in the Capacity of the Tetrapyrrole Pathway . . . . . 1052
- Lepista irina*  
Lepistirones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina) . . . . . 169
- Lepistirones  
Lepistirones, Major Volatile Metabolites from Liquid Cultures of *Lepista irina* (Basidiomycotina) . . . . . 169
- Lichen Substances  
On the Chemistry of the Lichen Genus *Lasallia* Mérat . . . . . 19
- Light-Evoked and Spontaneous Bumps  
Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors . . . . . 291
- Light-Harvesting Pigments  
UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus* . . . . . 717
- Light Scattering  
Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts . . . . . 233
- Limulus* Photoreceptor  
Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium . . . . . 461
- Linalool  
Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation . . . . . 1067
- Linear Bump Sum  
Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium . . . . . 461
- Lipid Phase Transitions  
Calorimetric Study on the Interactions of 5-*n*-Heptadec(en)ylresolcinols from Cereal Grains with Zwitterionic Phospholipid (DPPC) . . . . . 423

- Lipoxygenase  
Effect of the Safener Dichlormid on Maize Peroxygenase and Lipoxygenase . . . . . 920
- Littorine  
Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus* . . . . . 519
- Liverwort  
Growth and Secondary Product Formation of *in vitro* Cultures from the Liverwort *Reboulia hemisphaerica* . . . . . 28
- Local Anesthetic  
Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation . . . . . 79
- Lupinus*  
Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood . . . . . 331
- Lupinus albus*  
New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin (*Lupinus albus* L.) . . . . . 513
- Lupinus hartwegii*  
Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of *Lupinus polyphyllus* and *Lupinus hartwegii* . . . . . 725  
Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of *Lupinus* – a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures . . . . . 735
- Lupinus polyphyllus*  
Isoflavone Glycoside Formation in Transformed and Non-Transformed Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures of *Lupinus polyphyllus* and *Lupinus hartwegii* . . . . . 725  
Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of *Lupinus* – a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures . . . . . 735
- Lycopene  
Functional Complementation in *Escherichia coli* of Different Phytoene Desaturase Genes and Analysis of Accumulated Carotenes . . . . . 1045
- Magnesium Protoporphyrin Monomethylester  
The Greening Process in Cress Seedlings. III. Age-Dependent Changes in the Capacity of the Tetrapyrrole Pathway . . . . . 1052
- Maize  
Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Non-Treated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots . . . . . 850  
Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr . . . . . 893  
Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots . . . . . 926
- Malate Dehydrogenase  
Characterization of Two Thioredoxins in Pig Heart Including a New Mitochondrial Protein Malformations . . . . . 270
- Malformations  
Teratogenic and Metamorphosis-Inhibiting Activity of Retinoic Acid in *Ciona intestinalis* . . . . . 1094
- Malonylglucosides  
New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin (*Lupinus albus* L.) . . . . . 513
- Mamestra brassicae*  
Biogenic Amine Levels in the Haemolymph of the Cabbage Armyworm Larvae (*Mamestra brassicae*) Following Injection of Octopamine Insecticides . . . . . 127
- Manganese  
Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II . . . . . 765  
Oxabetrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress . . . . . 950  
Acceleration of Enzyme-Dependent Carthamin Formation by Manganese with Diversed Valence States . . . . . 1011
- Marine Microorganisms  
Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Biosurfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea . . . . . 197  
Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK1 . . . . . 204  
Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants . . . . . 210
- Mass Spectrometry  
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer *Eldana saccharina* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) . . . . . 678
- Mechanisms of Action  
An Overview of the Mechanisms of Action of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 819
- Mefenacet  
Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases . . . . . 915
- Mehler Reaction  
Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured *via* Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching . . . . . 635
- Membrane Lipids  
Effects of EPTC and Dichlormid on Membrane Lipid Composition of Maize Leaves and Roots . . . . . 926
- Membrane Potential  
Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts . . . . . 233
- Menaquinones  
*o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity . . . . . 585
- Metabolic Inactivation  
Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiolcarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity . . . . . 887
- Metabolic Regulation  
Plant ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase – Recent Advances and Biotechnological Perspectives (*A Review*) . . . . . 605

- Metabolism  
Effect of Temperature and Safeners on Glutathione Levels and Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Maize . . . . . 856
- Metaxyl  
Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of *Phytophthora* spp. Fungi . . . . . 866
- Metamorphosis  
Teratogenic and Metamorphosis-Inhibiting Activity of Retinoic Acid in *Ciona intestinalis* 1094
- Metaphase Chromosomes  
Slit Scan Flow Cytometry of Isolated Chromosomes Following Fluorescence Hybridization: an Approach of Online Screening for Specific Chromosomes and Chromosome Translocations . . . . . 433
- Metazachlor  
Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Herbicides in Maize Seedlings . . . . . 828
- Methylviologen  
The Effect of Activated Oxygen Species on Nitrogenase of *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 407
- Metolachlor  
Influence of the Safener Benoxacor on the Metabolism of Metolachlor in Corn . . . . . 846  
Influence of Safeners on the *in vivo* and *in vitro* Metabolism of Bentazon and Metolachlor by Grain Sorghum Shoots: a Preliminary Report  
Oxabetrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress . . . . . 950
- Metsulfuron Methyl  
Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors . . . . . 945
- MF<sub>1</sub>  
Subunit  $\delta$  of Chloroplast F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy . . . . . 759
- MG-191  
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosafeners . . . . . 805
- Microcalorimetry  
Calorimetric Study on the Interactions of 5-*n*-Heptadec(en)ylresolcinols from Cereal Grains with Zwitterionic Phospholipid (DPPC) . . . . . 423
- Microsomes  
Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures of Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and Their Involvement in Pterocarpin Phytoalexin Biosynthesis . . . . . 58  
Influence of Safeners on the *in vivo* and *in vitro* Metabolism of Bentazon and Metolachlor by Grain Sorghum Shoots: a Preliminary Report 906
- Microtox  
Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants . . . . . 210
- Mitochondrial Proteins  
Characterization of Two Thioredoxins in Pig Heart Including a New Mitochondrial Protein 270
- Mixed Function Oxidase  
Influence of Safeners on the *in vivo* and *in vitro* Metabolism of Bentazon and Metolachlor by Grain Sorghum Shoots: a Preliminary Report 906
- MMLV-Reverse Transcriptases  
Podoscyphic Acid, a New Inhibitor of Avian Myeloblastosis Virus and Moloney Murine Leukemia Virus Reverse Transcriptase from a *Podoscypha* species . . . . . 442
- Mobility  
Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions . . . . . 313
- Mono- and Divalent Cations  
Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose . . . . . 428
- Monocotyledonous Crops  
Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropionate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 . . . . . 901
- Monooxygenase  
Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize . . . . . 897  
Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases . . . . . 915
- Morinda lucida*  
Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid . . . . . 364
- Moulting Hormone  
Hormonal Regulation of Acetylcholinesterase in an Epithelial Cell Line from *Chironomus tentans* . . . . . 1089
- Mustela nivalis*  
Dimethylthioliolanes in the Anal Sac Secretion of the Weasel, *Mustela nivalis* (N) . . . . . 166
- Mycobacterium phlei*  
*o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity 585
- N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases  
N-Acetyl- $\beta$ -D-hexosaminidases of the Brine Shrimp *Artemia*: Partial Purification and Characterization . . . . . 781
- NA  
Milestones in the Development of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 794
- Naphthalic Acid  
Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr . . . . . 893
- Naphthalic Anhydride  
Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr . . . . . 893  
Naphthalic Anhydride Induces Imazethapyr Metabolism and Cytochrome P-450 Activity in Maize . . . . . 897
- Naphthoquinone  
Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone.

- I. Studies on the Redox Properties of Bovine Lens Proteins . . . . . 280
- Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. II. Mechanism of Hydrogenperoxide Formation and Inhibition of Iodide . . . . . 285
- Nauphoeta cinerea*  
Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones . . . . . 149
- Necrotaxis  
Directed Cell Movement with Steric Exclusion . . . . . 697
- Neuron  
Propagation of Voltage Transients in Arborized Neurites of Retzius Cells of the Leech in Culture . . . . . 687
- Neutron Capture Therapy  
Synthesis and Biological Behavior of a Boronated Analogue of the Antiestrogen U23,469-M . . . . . 252
- New Screening System  
Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors . . . . . 563
- Nicotiana tabacum*  
Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a *Nicotiana tabacum* L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance . . . . . 875
- Nitrate  
Control by Light Quality of Chlorophyll Synthesis in the Brown Alga *Desmarestia aculeata* No Correlation between Plasmid Content and Ability to Reduce Nitrate in Wild-Type Strains of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* (N) . . . . . 703
- Nitrate Reduction  
The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 217
- Nitrogenase Modification and Destruction  
The Effect of Activated Oxygen Species on Nitrogenase of *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 407
- NMR  
Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions . . . . . 313  
Cyclic Glycerol Acetals from the Abdominal Hair Pencil Secretion of the Male African Sugarcane Borer *Eldana saccharina* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae) . . . . . 678
- NMR Analysis  
Ferribactins – the Biogenetic Precursors of Pyoverdins . . . . . 527
- C-13-NMR  
Quantitative Characterization of Soil Organic Matter and Its Fractionation Products by Solid State High Resolution C-13 (CPMAS) Spectroscopy . . . . . 982
- Notholaena rigida*  
New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida* . . . . . 507
- Notholaena* spp.  
New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilanthoid Ferns . . . . . 325
- Novel Natural  
New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida* . . . . . 507
- Nucleotide Exchange  
Product Release is Not the Rate-Limiting Step during Cytochalasin B-Induced ATPase Activity of Monomeric Actin . . . . . 139
- Octopaminergic Insecticides  
Biogenic Amine Levels in the Haemolymph of the Cabbage Armyworm Larvae (*Mamestra brassicae*) Following Injection of Octopaminergic Insecticides . . . . . 127
- Oil Pollution  
Marine Biosurfactants, I. Screening for Biosurfactants among Crude Oil Degrading Marine Microorganisms from the North Sea . . . . . 197
- Oligomerization  
Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate Kinase from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties . . . . . 416
- Omphalone  
Omphalone, an Antibiotically Active Benzoquinone Derivative from Fermentations of *Lentinellus omphalodes* . . . . . 989
- Optic Lobes  
Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain (N) *Oryza sativa* L.  
Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice . . . . . 861
- Oscillations  
Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain (N) 1134
- OSCP  
Subunit  $\delta$  of Chloroplast  $F_0F_1$ -ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial  $F_0F_1$ -ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy . . . . . 759
- Ostrya carpinifolia*  
Flavonoid Aglycones from the Bud Exudates of Three Betulaceae (N) . . . . . 495
- Oxabetrinil  
Oxabetrinil Reversal of Metolachlor and Acid Soil Stress . . . . . 950
- Oxazaspiro[4.5]decane  
Dithiocarbamate Derivatives as Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 815
- Oxidative Stress  
Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a *Nicotiana tabacum* L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance . . . . . 875
- Oxygen Activation  
Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. I. Studies on the Redox Properties of Bovine Lens Proteins . . . . . 280
- Oxygen Binding  
Haemocyanin Synthesis in the Crayfish, *Astacus leptodactylus*: *in vitro* Production by the Midgut Gland after Addition of Oxygen Binding Modulators and Exogenous Copper . . . . . 163
- Oxygen Evolution  
The Flash Pattern of Photosynthetic Oxygen Evolution after Treatment with Low Concentrations of Hydroxylamine as a Function of

- the Previous  $S_1/S_0$ -Ratio. Further Evidence that  $NH_2OH$  Reduces the Water Oxidizing Complex in the Dark . . . . . 1033
- Oxygenated  $\beta$ -Damascones  
Biotransformation of  $\beta$ -Damascone by *Botrytis cinerea* . . . . . 395
- P-Element Transformation  
Incorporation of a *Calliphora* Arylphorin Gene into the Germ Line of *Drosophila* by P-Element-Mediated Transformation . . . 145
- Papaver somniferum*  
Further Studies of Sequestration of Alkaloids in *Papaver somniferum* L. Latex Vacuoles . . 377
- Paraquat  
Ions Modify the Strength of Interaction of Diquat and Paraquat with Some Proteins and Cellulose . . . . . 428  
Enhanced Inducibility of Antioxidant Systems in a *Nicotiana tabacum* L. Biotype Results in Acifluorfen Resistance . . . . . 875
- PBG-D-I Complex  
Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver . . . . . 1101
- PBG-Deaminase  
Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver . . . . . 1101
- Pectin Metabolism  
Characterization of Pectic Enzymes from the Chickpea Pathogen *Ascochyta rabiei* . . . . 51
- Pentose Phosphate Pathway  
Significance of the Non-Oxidative Pentose Phosphate Pathway in *Aspergillus oryzae* Grown on Different Carbon Sources . . . . 223
- 2-Pentylfuran  
Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects . . . 579
- Periodic Electric Field  
Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments . . . . . 487
- Periplaneta americana*  
Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones . . . 149
- Phenazines  
The Formation of Hydroxylated Phenazines by *Pseudomonas fluorescens* Y<sub>4</sub> upon Addition of  $Be^{2+}$  to the Culture Medium - a Defense Mechanism? . . . . . 194
- Phenolic Compounds  
Identification by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis . . 111
- Phenols  
Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladonia macaronesica* . . . . . 12
- Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase (PEPCase)  
Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions (N) . . . 502
- Phospholipid Bilayers  
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. X. Interactions with Chlortetracycline Hydrochloride . . . . . 133  
X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers. XI. Interactions with Chloramphenicol . . . 647
- Phosphorylase Kinase  
Glycogen Phosphorylase in the Fat Body of Two Cockroach Species, *Periplaneta americana* and *Nauphoeta cinerea*: Isolation, Partial Characterization of Three Forms and Activation by Hypertrehalosaemic Hormones . . . 149
- Phosphorylation  
Monosaccharides and Disaccharides Decrease the  $K_m$  for Phosphorylation of a Membrane-Bound Enzyme ATPase . . . . . 644
- Photoacoustics  
Is the *in vivo* Photosystem I Function Resistant to Photoinhibition? An Answer from Photoacoustic and Far-Red Absorbance Measurements in Intact Leaves . . . . . 1038
- Photoaffinity Labeling  
Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria . . . . 1059
- Photoautotrophic  
Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors . . . . . 563
- Photochemical Dehydrogenation  
Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes . 549
- Photoinhibition  
A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition . . . . . 557  
Is the *in vivo* Photosystem I Function Resistant to Photoinhibition? An Answer from Photoacoustic and Far-Red Absorbance Measurements in Intact Leaves . . . . . 1038
- Photophosphorylation  
Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation . . . . . 79
- Photoreceptor  
Electrogenic  $Na^+ - Ca^{2+}$  Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors . . . . . 451
- Photosynthesis  
Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts . . . . . 233  
UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus* . . . . . 717  
The Flash Pattern of Photosynthetic Oxygen Evolution after Treatment with Low Concentrations of Hydroxylamine as a Function of the Previous  $S_1/S_0$ -Ratio. Further Evidence that  $NH_2OH$  Reduces the Water Oxidizing Complex in the Dark . . . . . 1033

- Photosynthesis Regulation  
 Contrasting pH-Optima of Light-Driven O<sub>2</sub>- and H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-Reduction in Spinach Chloroplasts as Measured *via* Chlorophyll Fluorescence Quenching . . . . . 635
- Photosynthetic Bacteria  
 No Correlation between Plasmid Content and Ability to Reduce Nitrate in Wild-Type Strains of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* (N) . . . . 703
- Photosynthetic Electron Transport (PET)
- Herbicides  
 Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors . . . . . 563
- Photosystem I  
 Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration . . . . . 1024  
 Is the *in vivo* Photosystem I Function Resistant to Photoinhibition? An Answer from Photoacoustic and Far-Red Absorbance Measurements in Intact Leaves . . . . . 1038
- Photosystem II  
 Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes . . . . . 87  
 Turnover of the D-1 Reaction Center Polypeptide from Photosystem II in Intact Spruce Needles and Spinach Leaves . . . . . 245  
 A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition . . . . . 557  
 Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein . . . . . 575  
 Mass Spectrometric Analysis of N<sub>2</sub>-Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . 629  
 Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II . . . . . 765  
 Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration . . . . . 1024
- Photosystem II Inhibitor  
 X-Ray Structure Analysis of a Cyanoacrylate Inhibitor of Photosystem II Electron Transport . . . . . 93
- Phycobiliproteins  
 UV-VIS Absorption Spectra at High Pressure of C-Phycocyanin and Allophycocyanin from *Mastigocladus laminosus* . . . . . 717
- Phytoalexin  
 Time-Course Studies of Phytoalexins and Glucosinolates in UV-Irradiated Turnip Tissue . . . . . 189  
 Growth Inhibitions on Human Cancer Cell Cultures with the Indole Sulphur-Containing Phytoalexins and Their Analogues (N) . . . . 706
- Phytochrome Action  
 Are Bacterial Sensory Systems Models for  
 Phytochrome Action? Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis of the Phytochrome Module Related to Bacterial Transmitter Modules . . . . . 750
- Phytophthora*  
 Effects of Phenylamide Pesticides on the GSH-Conjugation System of *Phytophthora* spp. Fungi . . . . . 866
- Phytotron  
 Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions (N) . . . . 502
- Picea abies*  
 Phosphoenolpyruvate Carboxylase Activity in Norway Spruce Needles: Effects of Air Pollutants under Controlled Conditions (N) . . . . 502  
 Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*) . . . . . 597
- Picloram  
 Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants . . . . . 957
- Pig Liver  
 Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver . . . . . 1101
- Piscidia erythrina*  
 Naturally Occurring Coumaranochroman-4-ones: a New Class of Isoflavonoids from Lupins and Jamaican Dogwood . . . . . 331
- Pityrogramma triangularis*  
 New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilantheid Ferns . . . . . 325
- Plant Growth Regulator  
 Occurrence of Jasmonic Acid in the Red Alga *Gelidium latifolium* (N) . . . . . 1127
- Plantago*  
 Iridoids from *Plantago carinata* Schrad. . . . 1001
- Plantago* Species  
 Iridoid Glucosides from *Plantago altissima* L., *Plantago lanceolata* L., *Plantago atrata* Hoppe and *Plantago argentea* Chaix. (N) . . . . . 963
- Plasma Membrane  
 Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes . . . . . 106  
 Specific Crystal Chemical Interactions between Carcinogenic Aromatic Compounds and Cholesterol . . . . . 663
- Plasmid  
 No Correlation between Plasmid Content and Ability to Reduce Nitrate in Wild-Type Strains of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* (N) . . . . 703
- Plasmid Amplification  
 Replication of ColE1-Related Plasmids at Increased Growth Temperature in Dependence on the Rom Function . . . . . 1063
- Plasmid Replication  
 Replication of ColE1-Related Plasmids at Increased Growth Temperature in Dependence on the Rom Function . . . . . 1063
- Plastocyanin  
 Analysis of Light-Induced Absorbance Changes in the Near-Infrared Spectral Region. I. Characterization of Various Components in Isolated Chloroplasts . . . . . 233

- Plastoquinone  
A Contact Site between the Two Reaction Center Polypeptides of Photosystem II Is Involved in Photoinhibition . . . . . 557
- Platyzoma microphylla*  
New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilantheid Ferns . . . . . 325
- Poisson Statistics of Photons  
Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors . . . . . 291
- Polygalacturonase  
Characterization of Pectic Enzymes from the Chickpea Pathogen *Ascochyta rabiei* . . . . . 51
- Polymerase Chain Reaction  
Two Separate Genes Encode the Catalytic 70 kDa V-ATPase Subunit in *Psilotum* and *Equisetum* . . . . . 613
- Poplar Bud Exudate  
Identification by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis . . . . . 111
- Porphobilinogen  
Studies on Porphobilinogen-Deaminase from *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* . . . . . 1017
- Porphyryn Biosynthesis  
Studies on Porphobilinogen-Deaminase from *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* . . . . . 1017
- Pot Assay  
Photoautotrophic Cultured Plant Cells: A Novel System to Survey New Photosynthetic Electron Transport Inhibitors . . . . . 563
- PP<sub>1</sub>-phosphofruktokinase  
Activities and Regulation of Enzymes of Carbohydrate Metabolism in Spruce (*Picea abies*) . . . . . 597
- Precursor-Product Amino Acids  
On the Relationships between the Genetic Code Coevolution Hypothesis and the Physicochemical Hypothesis . . . . . 305
- Prenylated Flavanone Production  
Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia* . . . . . 172
- Prenylated Isoflavones  
Substrate Specificity in the Fungal Metabolism of Prenylated Flavonoids . . . . . 341
- Pretilachlor  
Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice . . . . . 861
- Prodrug  
Studies in Enteric Anthelmintics: Activity Profile of Prodrug of a Bisbenzimidazole . . . . . 673
- Propolis  
Identification by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis . . . . . 111
- Prosafeners  
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosafeners . . . . . 805
- Protein Drugs  
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O). For Example: Human Cholinesterase . . . . . 789
- Protochlorophyllide  
The Greening Process in Cress Seedlings. III. Age-Dependent Changes in the Capacity of the Tetrapyrrole Pathway . . . . . 1052
- Protoporphyrin  
The Greening Process in Cress Seedlings. III. Age-Dependent Changes in the Capacity of the Tetrapyrrole Pathway . . . . . 1052
- Pseudobactin  
Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2" . . . . . 522
- Pseudomonas*  
Isolation and Spectroscopic Characterization of the Pyoverdin Chromophore and of its 5-Hydroxy Analogue . . . . . 993
- Pseudomonas aeruginosa*  
Two Pyoverdins from *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* R. . . . . 534
- Pseudomonas fluorescens*  
The Formation of Hydroxylated Phenazines by *Pseudomonas fluorescens* Y<sub>4</sub> upon Addition of Be<sup>2+</sup> to the Culture Medium – a Defense Mechanism? . . . . . 194  
On the Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophor of the Pyoverdins . . . . . 398  
Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2" . . . . . 522
- Pteridaceae  
New Frond Exudate Flavonoids from Cheilantheid Ferns . . . . . 325  
New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida* . . . . . 507
- Pterocarpan Phytoalexins  
Elicitor-Induced Formation of Pterocarpan Phytoalexins in Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) Cell Suspension Cultures from Constitutive Isoflavone Conjugates upon Inhibition of Phenylalanine Ammonia Lyase . . . . . 43  
Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450 Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures of Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) and Their Involvement in Pterocarpan Phytoalexin Biosynthesis . . . . . 58
- Purple Bacteria  
Characterization of Reaction Center-B875 Complex of *Rhodocyclus gelatinosus*: Q<sub>B</sub> Site Properties Derived from Reconstitution Experiments . . . . . 111 . . . . . 99
- Pyoverdins  
On the Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophor of the Pyoverdins . . . . . 398  
Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2" . . . . . 522  
Ferribactins – the Biogenetic Precursors of Pyoverdins . . . . . 527  
Two Pyoverdins from *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* R. . . . . 534  
Isolation and Spectroscopic Characterization of the Pyoverdin Chromophore and of its 5-Hydroxy Analogue . . . . . 993



- Pyruvate Kinase  
Oligomeric Forms of Pyruvate Kinase from *Chlorella* with Different Kinetic Properties . . . 416
- Quantum Bumps  
Stochastic Treatment of Bump Latency and Temporal Overlapping in *Limulus* Ventral Photoreceptors . . . . . 291  
Single Photon-Evoked Events of the Ventral Nerve Photoreceptor Cell of *Limulus*. Facilitation, Adaptation and Dependence of Lowered External Calcium . . . . . 461
- Quinones  
Characterization of Reaction Center-B875 Complex of *Rhodocyclyus gelatinosus*: Q<sub>B</sub> Site Properties Derived from Reconstitution Experiments . . . . . 99  
The Inhibition of Glutathione Reductase by Quinones (N) . . . . . 966
- Radioimmunoassay  
Accumulation of the Phytoalexin Glyceollin I in Soybean Nodules Infected by a *Bradyrhizobium japonicum nifA* Mutant (N) . . . . . 318
- Rat Brain Cells  
A Simple Method for Counting Small Numbers of Cells by Flow Cytometry (N) . . . . . 1130
- Reaction Center  
Characterization of Reaction Center-B875 Complex of *Rhodocyclyus gelatinosus*: Q<sub>B</sub> Site Properties Derived from Reconstitution Experiments . . . . . 99  
Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria . . . . . 1059
- Reboulia hemisphaerica*  
Growth and Secondary Product Formation of *in vitro* Cultures from the Liverwort *Reboulia hemisphaerica* . . . . . 28
- Redoxcycling  
Cataract Induction by 1,2-Naphthoquinone. I. Studies on the Redox Properties of Bovine Lens Proteins . . . . . 280
- Retinoic Acid  
Teratogenic and Metamorphosis-Inhibiting Activity of Retinoic Acid in *Ciona intestinalis* 1094
- Ribonucleotide Reductase  
Characterization of Two Thioredoxins in Pig Heart Including a New Mitochondrial Protein 270
- Rice  
Effects of the Herbicide Pretilachlor and the Safener Fenclorim on Glutathione Content and Glutathione-Dependent Enzyme Activity of Rice . . . . . 861  
Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiocarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity . . . . . 887
- Rhodobacter capsulatus*  
No Correlation between Plasmid Content and Ability to Reduce Nitrate in Wild-Type Strains of *Rhodobacter capsulatus* (N) . . . . . 703  
Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles Are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria . . . . . 1059
- Rhodobacter sphaeroides*  
Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles Are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria . . . . . 1059
- Rhodophyta  
Occurrence of Jasmonic Acid in the Red Alga *Gelidium latifolium* (N) . . . . . 1127
- RNA Replication  
Phenotypic Traits and Regulatory Role of RNA Folding in Molecular Selection . . . . . 656
- Rom-Protein  
Replication of COIE 1-Related Plasmids at Increased Growth Temperature in Dependence on the Rom Function . . . . . 1063
- Rosa rugosa*  
Novel Bisabolanoloids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 349  
Highly Oxygenated Bisabolanoloids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 357
- Rosmarinic Acid  
Hydroxyphenylpyruvate Reductase from Cell Suspension Cultures of *Coleus blumei* Benth. 371
- Rubiaceae  
Cell Free Synthesis of *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid in Protein Extracts from Anthraquinone and Phylloquinone (Vitamin K<sub>1</sub>) Producing Plant Cell Suspension Cultures. Occurrence of Intermediates between Isochorismic and *o*-Succinylbenzoic Acid . . . . . 364
- S-States  
Mass Spectrometric Analysis of N<sub>2</sub>-Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash-Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 629
- S-States (*Synechococcus*)  
The Flash Pattern of Photosynthetic Oxygen Evolution after Treatment with Low Concentrations of Hydroxylamine as a Function of the Previous S<sub>1</sub>/S<sub>0</sub>-Ratio. Further Evidence that NH<sub>2</sub>OH Reduces the Water Oxidizing Complex in the Dark . . . . . 1033
- Saccharides  
Monosaccharides and Disaccharides Decrease the K<sub>m</sub> for Phosphorylation of a Membrane-Bound Enzyme ATPase . . . . . 644
- Saccharomyces cerevisiae*  
Studies on Porphobilinogen-Deaminase from *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* . . . . . 1017
- Safeners  
Chemistry and Structure-Activity Relationships of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 798  
Bioactive Chemical Bond Systems in Safeners and Prosafeners . . . . . 805  
An Overview of the Mechanisms of Action of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 819  
Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize . . . . . 836  
Glutathione S-Transferase Activity in Non-treated and CGA-154281-Treated Maize Shoots . . . . . 850

- The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn . . . . . 882
- Mode of Action of Naphthalic Acid as a Safener for Imazethapyr . . . . . 893
- Metabolism of the Aryloxyphenoxypropionate Herbicide, CGA 184927, in Wheat, Barley and Maize: Differential Effects of the Safener, CGA 185072 . . . . . 901
- Antagonistic Interactions of Mefenacet with Inhibitors of Monooxygenases . . . . . 915
- Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors . . . . . 945
- Antagonism by Clopyralid of Picloram-Induced Ethylene Biosynthesis in Rapeseed Plants . . . . . 957
- Safening Effect
- Mode of Safener Action of Dimepiperate, a Thiolcarbamate Herbicide, on Bensulfuron Methyl Activity . . . . . 887
- Sarcoplasmic Reticulum
- Monosaccharides and Disaccharides Decrease the  $K_m$  for Phosphorylation of a Membrane-Bound Enzyme ATPase . . . . . 644
- The Modulation of the Calcium Transport by Skeletal Muscle Sarcoplasmic Reticulum in the Hibernating European Hamster . . . . . 1109
- Scarabaeinae
- Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachlomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis* . . . . . 1073
- Secondary Alcohols
- Enantioselective Multidimensional Gas Chromatography of Some Secondary Alcohols and Their Acetates from Banana . . . . . 33
- Secondary Electron Acceptor
- Characterization of Reaction Center-B875 Complex of *Rhodocyclus gelatinosus*:  $Q_B$  Site Properties Derived from Reconstitution Experiments . . . . . 99
- Secondary Products
- Growth and Secondary Product Formation of *in vitro* Cultures from the Liverwort *Reboulia hemisphaerica* . . . . . 28
- Sedative Effects
- Aromatherapy: Evidence for Sedative Effects of the Essential Oil of Lavender after Inhalation . . . . . 1067
- Seed Oil
- Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects . . . . . 579
- SEM
- Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. . . . . 743
- Semiochemicals
- Semiochemicals of the Scarabaeinae, III: Identification of the Attractant for the Dung Beetle *Pachlomerus femoralis* in the Fruit of the Spineless Monkey Orange Tree, *Strychnos madagascariensis* . . . . . 1073
- Sequestration
- Further Studies of Sequestration of Alkaloids in *Papaver somniferum* L. Latex Vacuoles . . . . . 377
- Sesquiterpene
- Novel Bisabolonoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 349
- Highly Oxygenated Bisabolonoids in *Rosa rugosa* Leaves . . . . . 357
- Sethoxydim
- Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlormid on Lipid Synthesis and Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum . . . . . 934
- Sex Pheromone
- Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) . . . . . 257
- Shear Deformation
- Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments . . . . . 487
- Shear Elastic Modulus
- Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments . . . . . 487
- Siderophores
- Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2" . . . . . 522
- Singlet Lifetimes
- Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes . . . . . 549
- Sitophilus zeamays*
- Volatile Constituents from *Crotalaria ochroleuca* and Their Effect on Pest Insects . . . . . 579
- Slit Scan Flow Cytometry
- Slit Scan Flow Cytometry of Isolated Chromosomes Following Fluorescence Hybridization: an Approach of Online Screening for Specific Chromosomes and Chromosome Translocations . . . . . 433
- Soil
- Quantitative Characterization of Soil Organic Matter and Its Fractionation Products by Solid State High Resolution C-13 (CPMAS) Spectrometry . . . . . 982
- Solutions
- Temperature Dependence of the Rotational Mobility of the Sugar and Water Molecules in Concentrated Aqueous Trehalose and Sucrose Solutions . . . . . 313
- Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia*
- Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia* . . . . . 172
- Sophoraflavanone G
- Prenylated Flavanone Production in Callus Cultures of *Sophora flavescens* var. *angustifolia* . . . . . 172
- Sorghum bicolor* (L.) Moench.
- Effects of the Herbicide Sethoxydim and the Safener Dichlormid on Lipid Synthesis and

- Acetyl-CoA Carboxylase Activity of Grain Sorghum . . . . . 934
- Spectral Data  
Isolation and Spectroscopic Characterization of the Pyoverdin Chromophore and of its 5-Hydroxy Analogue . . . . . 993
- Spherical Shell Rheology  
Shear Deformation of the Spherical Shell Acted on by an External Alternating Electric Field: Possible Applications to Cell Deformation Experiments . . . . . 487
- Squaric Acid Diamides  
Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent (N) . . . . . 498
- Squaric Acid Diethylester  
Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent (N) . . . . . 498
- Squaric Acid Monoamides  
Squaric Acid Diethylester: A Simple and Convenient Coupling Reagent (N) . . . . . 498
- Stabilization  
Protein Drugs Stabilized by Heavy Water (D<sub>2</sub>O). For Example: Human Cholinesterase . . . . . 789
- Starch Biosynthesis  
Plant ADP-Glucose Pyrophosphorylase – Recent Advances and Biotechnical Perspectives (*A Review*) . . . . . 605
- Statistical Mechanics  
Phenotypic Traits and Regulatory Role of RNA Folding in Molecular Selection . . . . . 656
- Stereochemistry  
A New Investigation on Constituents of *Aloe* and *Rhamnus* Species, XV. Homonataloins A and B from *Aloe lateritia*: Isolation, Structure and Configurational Determination of the Diastereomers . . . . . 177
- Steric Interaction  
Directed Cell Movement with Steric Exclusion . . . . . 697
- Stink Bug  
Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.) . . . . . 264
- Stress Conditions  
Turnover of the D-1 Reaction Center Polypeptide from Photosystem II in Intact Spruce Needles and Spinach Leaves . . . . . 245
- Structural Determination  
Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladonia macaronesica* . . . . . 12
- Structure-Activity Relationship  
Chemistry and Structure-Activity Relationships of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 798
- Structure Elucidation  
Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK 1 . . . . . 204  
Variants of Pseudobactin and Pseudobactin A: New Pyoverdin Type Peptide Siderophores from *Pseudomonas fluorescens* "E2" . . . . . 522
- Substrate Specificity of *o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase  
*o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity . . . . . 585
- Subunit  $\delta$   
Subunit  $\delta$  of Chloroplast F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase and OSCP of Mitochondrial F<sub>0</sub>F<sub>1</sub>-ATPase: a Comparison by CD-Spectroscopy . . . . . 759
- Subunit Labeling  
On the Accessibility of Essential Tyrosines in Isolated and Activated Chloroplast H<sup>+</sup>-ATPase . . . . . 71
- o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase  
*o*-Succinylbenzoate: Coenzyme A Ligase, an Enzyme Involved in Menaquinone (Vitamin K<sub>2</sub>) Biosynthesis, Displays Broad Specificity . . . . . 585
- Sulfonylurea Herbicide  
The Effect of BAS 145138 Safener on Chlorimuron Ethyl Metabolism and Toxicity in Corn . . . . . 882
- Superoxide  
The Effect of Activated Oxygen Species on Nitrogenase of *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 407
- Surface Lipids  
Composition of the Surface Lipids from the European Mole (*Talpa europaea*) . . . . . 122
- Surfactants  
Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants . . . . . 210
- Symphyogyna brongniartii*  
Occurrence of (–)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphyogyna brongniartii* . . . . . 183
- Synechococcus* PCC 6301  
Inactivation of Photosynthetic O<sub>2</sub> Evolution in the Cyanobacterium *Anacystis nidulans* PCC 6301: Influence of Nitrogen Metabolites and Divalent Cation Concentration . . . . . 1024
- Synthetic Peptides  
Partial Characterization of anti-HLA Class II Antibodies Isolated by Aid of Sepharose-Peptide Immunoabsorbents (N) . . . . . 321
- Tephрина arenacearia*  
Epoxyheptadecadienes Identified as Sex Pheromone Components of *Tephрина arenacearia* Hbn. (Lepidoptera: Geometridae) . . . . . 257
- Terpenoid Production  
Occurrence of (–)-Geosmin and Other Terpenoids in an Axenic Culture of the Liverwort *Symphyogyna brongniartii* . . . . . 183
- $\alpha$ -Terpineol  
Pheromone Blends of Predaceous Bugs (Heteroptera: Pentatomidae: *Podisus* spp.) . . . . . 264
- Thiameturon  
Influence of BAS-145138 on the Activity of Sulfonylurea and Imidazolinone Herbicides . . . . . 939
- Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles  
Thiazolylidene-Ketonitriles are Efficient Inhibitors of Electron Transport in Reaction Centers from Photosynthetic Bacteria . . . . . 1059
- Thiocarbamate Sulphoxide  
Effect of a Safener Towards Thiocarbamates on Plant Lipid Metabolism . . . . . 931
- Thiocarbamates  
Milestones in the Development of Herbicide Safeners . . . . . 794

- Thioredoxins  
   Characterization of Two Thioredoxins in Pig Heart Including a New Mitochondrial Protein 270
- Thylakoids  
   Inhibitory Effect of Crown Compound on Photoelectron Transport Activity of Beet Spinach Thylakoid Membranes . . . . . 87
- Tilia tomentosa* Moench.  
   Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. . . . . 743
- Tiliaceae  
   Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. . . . . 743
- Tonoplast  
   Cytoplasmic pH and Abscisic Acid Transport across Guard Cell Membranes . . . . . 106
- Toxicity  
   Marine Biosurfactants, III. Toxicity Testing with Marine Microorganisms and Comparison with Synthetic Surfactants . . . . . 210
- Transformations  
   On The Genesis of the Dicarboxylic Acids Bound Amidically to the Chromophore of the Pyoverdins . . . . . 398  
   Effects of Culture Conditions on Isoflavonoid Levels of Transformed and Non-Transformed Cultures of *Lupinus* - a Comparison of Suspension and Hairy Root Cultures . . . . . 735
- Transmitter Modules  
   Are Bacterial Sensory Systems Models for Phytochrome Action? Hydrophobic Cluster Analysis of the Phytochrome Module Related to Bacterial Transmitter Modules . . . . . 750
- Transport  
   *Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Teline monspessulana* . . . . . 1080
- Trehalose Tetraester  
   Marine Biosurfactants, II. Production and Characterization of an Anionic Trehalose Tetraester from the Marine Bacterium *Arthrobacter* sp. EK 1 . . . . . 204
- 1,2,6-Tri-O-galloyl- $\beta$ -D-glucopyranose  
   Biosynthesis of Gallotannins.  $\beta$ -Glucogallin-Dependent Galloylation of 1,6-Digalloylglucose to 1,2,6-Trigalloylglucose . . . . . 389
- Triazine Resistance  
   Activity of Photosystem II Herbicides Is Related with Their Residence Times at the D1 Protein . . . . . 575
- Triplet Yields  
   Photophysical and Photochemical Properties of 2,3-Dihydro-4(1H)-quinolinones. Part II. Rates and Mechanism of Primary Processes . . . . . 549
- Triterpenes  
   Chemical Constituents of the Lichen *Cladonia macaronesica* . . . . . 12  
   New Triterpenes from the Frond Exudate of the Fern *Notholaena rigida* . . . . . 507
- Tropane Alkaloids  
   Identification of Tropane Alkaloids in Hairy Root Cultures of *Hyoscyamus albus* . . . . . 519
- Turnip  
   Time-Course Studies of Phytoalexins and Glucosinolates in UV-Irradiated Turnip Tissue . . . . . 189
- Turnover  
   Turnover of the D-1 Reaction Center Polypeptide from Photosystem II in Intact Spruce Needles and Spinach Leaves . . . . . 245
- Tyrosine  
   Sequence Analysis of the D1 and D2 Reaction Center Proteins of Photosystem II . . . . . 765
- Uncoupling  
   Local Anesthetic Binding to Thylakoid Membranes. Relation to Inhibition of Light-Induced Membrane Energization and Photophosphorylation . . . . . 79
- Uptake  
   Basis for Differential Chemical Selectivity of MG-191 Safener against Acetochlor and EPTC Injury to Maize . . . . . 836
- Uresiphita reversalis*  
   *Uresiphita reversalis* (Lepidoptera: Pyralidae): Carrier-Mediated Uptake and Sequestration of Quinolizidine Alkaloids Obtained from the Host Plant *Teline monspessulana* . . . . . 1080
- Uroporphyrins  
   Studies on Uroporphyrinogen Biosynthesis in Pig Liver . . . . . 1101
- UV-A Radiation  
   UV Radiation Dependent Flavonoid Accumulation of *Cistus laurifolius* L. . . . . 37
- UV Irradiation  
   Time-Course Studies of Phytoalexins and Glucosinolates in UV-Irradiated Turnip Tissue . . . . . 189
- Vanadium-Nitrogenase  
   The Expression of a Third Nitrogenase in the Cyanobacterium *Anabaena variabilis* . . . . . 217
- Vision  
   Electrogenic  $\text{Na}^+ - \text{Ca}^{2+}$  Exchange Contributes to the Light Response of Fly Photoreceptors . . . . . 451
- Volatiles  
   Identification by Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry of 150 Compounds in Propolis . . . . . 111
- Water Splitting  
   Mass Spectrometric Analysis of  $\text{N}_2$ -Formation Induced by the Oxidation of Hydrazine and Hydroxylamine in Flash Illuminated Thylakoid Preparations of the Filamentous Cyanobacterium *Oscillatoria chalybea* . . . . . 629
- $\gamma$ -Waves  
   Synchronized Activity in the Insect Brain (N) 1134
- Wax Surface Structure  
   Surface Structure and Chemical Composition of Epicuticular Waxes during Leaf Development of *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. . . . . 743
- Weasel  
   Dimethyldithiolanes in the Anal Sac Secretion of the Weasel, *Mustela nivalis* (N) . . . . . 166

- |  |      |  |     |
|--|------|--|-----|
| White Lupin  |      | Yeast Elicitor   |     |
| New Isoflavone Glucosides from White Lupin<br>( <i>Lupinus albus</i> L.) . . . . .                           | 513  | Elicitor Induction of Cytochrome P-450<br>Monooxygenases in Cell Suspension Cultures<br>of Chickpea ( <i>Cicer arietinum</i> L.) and Their In-<br>volvement in Pterocarpan Phytoalexin Bio-<br>synthesis . . . . . | 58  |
| X-Ray Diffraction  |      |  |     |
| X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers.  |      |  |     |
| X. Interactions with Chlortetracycline Hydro-<br>chloride . . . . .  | 133  | <i>Zea mays</i> (L.)   |     |
| X-Ray Studies on Phospholipid Bilayers.  |      | Chemical Reactivity and Safener Activity of<br>Acetal Compounds . . . . .  | 810 |
| XI. Interactions with Chloramphenicol . . . .  | 647  | Comparative Effectiveness and Mode of<br>Action of Safeners for Chloroacetamide Her-<br>bicides in Maize Seedlings . . . . .   | 828 |
| X-Ray Structure  |      | Safeners as Corn Seedling Protectants against<br>Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitors . . . . .  | 945 |
| X-Ray Structure Analysis of a Cyanoacrylate<br>Inhibitor of Photosystem II Electron Trans-<br>port . . . . . | 93   |  |     |
| Yeast  |      |  |     |
| Studies on Porphobilinogen-Deaminase from<br><i>Saccharomyces cerevisiae</i> . . . . .                       | 1017 |  |     |

## Authors Index

- Abraham, R. 252  
 Abraham, W. R. 169  
 Abulnaja, K. O. 931  
 Agalidis, I. 99  
 Agostini, B. 1109  
 Aguilar, M. 777  
 Akimenko, V. K. 966  
 Aldrich, J. R. 264  
 Alfermann, A. W. 371, 519  
 Allen, N. S. 183  
 Anderson, M. P. 850  
 Anke, T. 442, 989  
 Arriaga-Giner, F. J. 507  
 Aten, J. A. 433
- Bader, K. P. 629  
 Bagchi, S. N. 407  
 Baier, M. 106  
 Bakalova, S. 549  
 Barbier, M. 706  
 Barrett, M. 897  
 Barta, I. Cs. 926  
 Barz, W. 43, 51, 58  
 Bastide, J. 945  
 Batlle, A. M. del C. 1017, 1101  
 Becker, H. 28, 183  
 Bednarz, J. 591  
 Bellinder, R. R. 856  
 Benda, I. 395  
 Benoni, H. 993  
 Bérces, T. 549  
 Berlin, J. 725, 735  
 Bermejo Barrera, J. 12  
 Bernays, E. A. 1080  
 Bestmann, H. J. 579  
 Bhaduri, A. P. 673  
 Bickel-Sandkötter, S. 71  
 Biczók, L. 549  
 Bironaite, D. A. 966  
 Blaß, S. 1130  
 Blée, E. 920  
 Blos, I. 1052  
 Bodenstein, J. 270  
 Böger, P. 407  
 Boll, M. 597  
 Borges, M. 264  
 Bothe, H. 217  
 Brennicke, A. 709  
 Briskot, G. 993  
 Buchbauer, G. 1067  
 Budzikiewicz, H. 194, 398, 522, 527, 534, 993  
 Buglass, A. J. 166  
 Burger, B. V. 678, 1073
- Čėnas, N. K. 966  
 Cenciarelli, C. 321  
 Chamovitz, D. 1045  
 Chersi, A. 321  
 Chini, E. N. 644  
 Contag, B. 663  
 Corbin, F. T. 906  
 Correa Garcia, S. R. 1017  
 Cottingham, C. K. 846  
 Craig, D. C. 93  
 Cremer, Ch. 433  
 Cserhāti, T. 428
- Dancker, P. 139  
 Darling, F. M. C. 166  
 Dathe, W. 1127  
 De Martino, L. 1109  
 Dean, J. V. 850  
 Denucé, J. M. 1094  
 Denzel, K. 389  
 Devlin, R. M. 939  
 Devys, M. 706  
 Di Giulio, M. 305  
 Diaz, E. 433  
 Diener, R. 33  
 Dietrich, H. 1067  
 Doerk, K. 519  
 Dorsch, M. 145  
 Drosdziok, W. 498  
 Dudin, G. 433  
 Duncan, R. R. 950  
 Dutka, F. 805, 810  
 Duval, E. 569
- Eberle, G. 498  
 Ebert, E. 901  
 Ekler, Z. 810, 828  
 El Kaoua, M. 569  
 Elstner, E. F. 280, 285  
 Engelbrecht, S. 759  
 Erdogan, S. 735  
 Erkel, G. 442  
 Ernst, A. 407  
 Espinoza, M. A. 647  
 Esser, K. 71  
 Evangelista, M. 321  
 Evstatieva, L. 963  
 Eyletters, M. 1038  
 Fecker, L. 725  
 Fedtke, C. 915  
 Feige, G. B. 19  
 Fenwick, G. R. 189  
 Fernández, A. 656  
 Fikus, M. 487  
 Fischer, H.-M. 318  
 Fischer, R. 717
- Follmann, H. 270  
 Francke, W. 257  
 Fromherz, P. 687  
 Fründ, R. 982  
 Fumagalli, S. A. 1101  
 Funke-Höpfner, B. 781
- Gabel, D. 252  
 Gäde, G. 149  
 Gaudin, J. 901  
 Gautheron, D. C. 759  
 Gellissen, G. 163  
 Gimés, A. 815  
 Gipp, S. 534  
 Glüsenkamp, K.-H. 498  
 Godde, D. 245  
 Gogarten, J. P. 613  
 González, A. G. 12  
 Greenaway, W. 111  
 Griebenow, K. 228  
 Gronwald, J. W. 850  
 Gross, G. G. 389  
 Grotjohann, N. 416  
 Gruler, H. 697  
 Gullner, G. 875  
 Gülz, P.-G. 37, 743  
 Gunia, W. 58  
 Gunkel, W. 197, 210  
 Günther, G. 79  
 Gupta, M. P. 183  
 Gupta, S. 673  
 Gwose, I. 527
- Haefs, M. 1059  
 Hahn, J. 534  
 Hall, J. Ch. 957  
 Han, S. 861  
 Handjieva, N. 963, 1001  
 Hanelt, S. 750  
 Hanssen, H.-P. 169  
 Hansson, B. S. 257  
 Hartung, W. 106  
 Harwood, J. L. 931  
 Hashidoko, Y. 349, 357  
 Hasselbach, W. 1109  
 Hatzios, K. K. 798, 819, 846, 861, 934  
 Häusler, E. 371  
 Hausmann, M. 433  
 Havaux, M. 1038  
 Haverkamp, F. 217  
 He, P. 629  
 Hecker, M. 1063  
 Heilig, R. 433  
 Hendrich, A. B. 423  
 Hennecke, H. 318  
 Hennecke, R. 163
- Hennig, H. T. 461  
 Hernández Padrón, C. E. 12  
 Hess, L. 139  
 Heyde, Ch. 789  
 Hiesel, R. 709  
 Hildebrandt, P. 228  
 Hinderer, W. 58  
 Hirschberg, J. 1045  
 Hochstrate, P. 451  
 Hohlfeld, H. 502  
 Hohlneicher, U. 527  
 Holzwarth, A. R. 228  
 Homeyer, B. C. 377  
 Hoppe, U. 122  
 Horbach, M. 71  
 Huppertz, J. L. 93
- Ichinose, K. 563  
 Iinuma, M. 172  
 Ingham, J. L. 331, 341  
 Ishikura, N. 1003  
 Ishizuka, K. 887  
 Ivanova, A. 1001  
 Iwaya, N. 357
- Jablonkai, I. 836  
 Jacob, J. 122  
 Jäger, W. 1067  
 Jähde, E. 498  
 Jiménez, M. 777  
 Jirovetz, L. 1067  
 Junge, W. 759
- Kahl, G. 1  
 Karamat, E. 1067  
 Karger, N. 313  
 Katiyar, J. C. 673  
 Kawabata, J. 331  
 Kawai, S. 172  
 Kentemich, T. 217  
 Khan, A. M. 673  
 Kimura, Y. 513  
 Király, L. 875  
 Kirschfeld, K. 1134  
 Kishida, M. 563  
 Kleber, E. 280, 285  
 Kleczkowski, L. A. 605  
 Klemme, J.-H. 703  
 Klomfaß, J. 461  
 Klughammer, Ch. 233  
 Knogge, W. 969  
 Knollmüller, M. 67  
 Kochansky, J. P. 264  
 Kőmives, T. 798, 866, 875  
 Korth, H. 194, 993

- Kotler, M. L. 1101  
 Kowallik, W. 416  
 Kozubek, A. 423  
 Kreuz, K. 901  
 Kröner, R. 280, 285  
 Krupina, M. V. 1127  
 Kulys, J. J. 966  
 Kunkel, D. L. 856  
 Kwak, S. S. 563  
  
 Laasch, H. 79  
 Lamoureux, G. L. 882  
 Lang, S. 197, 204, 210  
 Laval-Martin, D. 569  
 Lederhofer, R. 291  
 Lefèvre, J. F. 527  
 Leistner, E. 364, 585  
 Lennartz, K. 1130  
 Leuckert, Ch. 19  
 Lewis, J. A. 189  
 Lex, J. 993  
 Linden, H. 1045  
 Linkkila, T. P. 613  
 Löfstedt, C. 257  
 Lönneborg, A. 605  
 López-Figueroa, F. 542  
 López-Pérez, M. J. 223  
 Loreth, W. 67  
 Lotina-Hennsen, B. 777  
 Lüdemann, H.-D. 313, 982  
 Lusby, W. R. 264  
 Lüthi, E. 605  
 Lütz, C. 502  
  
 Mackenbrock, U. 43  
 Mann, K. 495  
 Matolcsy, G. 815  
 Maxson, J. M. 897  
 May, J. 111  
 Mayumi, J. 172  
 McFadden, H. G. 93  
 Medentsev, A. G. 966  
 Messinger, J. 1033  
 Meyer-Fernandes, J. R. 644  
 Michels, J. 993  
 Milhomme, H. 945  
 Minkov, I. B. 621  
 Misawa, N. 1045  
 Mizuno, M. 172  
 Mizutani, J. 331, 341, 349, 357, 513  
 Mocek, U. 989  
 Mohanty, P. 87  
 Mohn, G. 527  
 Monde, K. 189  
 Montllor, C. B. 1080  
 Morais, R. M. S. C. 28  
 Moreland, D. E. 906  
 Morganti-Kossmann, M. C. 321  
 Moriyama, M. 331  
 Mosandl, A. 33  
 Muiño-Blanco, T. 223  
  
 Müller, E. 743  
 Müller, R. 252  
  
 Naber, J. D. 575  
 Neira, F. 133  
 Nell, A. E. 678  
 Neubauer, Ch. 635  
 Niyonzima, D.-D. 177  
  
 Oettmeier, W. 1059  
 Olsen, O.-A. 605  
 Orihara, S. 331  
 Oros, G. 866  
 Oster, U. 1052  
  
 Parniske, M. 318  
 Passeri, A. 197, 204  
 Pauly, S. 1033  
 Pawlowski, P. 487  
 Peakmann, T. M. 507  
 Pecker, I. 1045  
 Peleato, M. L. 223  
 Penin, F. 759  
 Pérez, J. A. C. 223  
 Petersen, M. 371  
 Petersen, W. G. B. 1073  
 Pham, T. D. T. 377  
 Phillips, J. N. 93  
 Pietschmann, M. 579  
 Pistorius, E. K. 1024  
 Plank, Ch. 1067  
 Popov, S. 1001  
 Poremba, K. 210  
 Posner, B. 19  
 Prasad, R. B. N. 743  
 Preuße, S. 1059  
 Pulverer, G. 194, 993  
  
 Rajewsky, M. F. 498  
 Rauwald, H.-W. 177  
 Reed, J. 759  
 Reising, H. 635  
 Reiss-Husson, F. 99  
 Rensen, J. J. S. van 575  
 Reuß, H. 461  
 Reznik, H. 37  
 Riethdorf, S. 1063  
 Rippert, M. 735  
 Ritter, K. 139  
 Rivas, E. 99  
 Roberts, M. F. 377  
 Rodriguez Pérez, E. M. 12  
 Roitman, J. N. 325, 495  
 Roque-Reséndiz, J. L. 777  
 Rossetti, M. V. 1017, 1101  
 Roux, Ch. 945  
 Rüdiger, W. 1052  
 Ruff, H.-J. 67  
 Rügenhagen, C. 725, 735  
 Rullkötter, J. 507  
 Rusness, D. G. 882  
 Ruyters, G. 416  
  
 Saadi, H. 963, 1001  
 Sabat, S. C. 87  
 Saito, K. 1011  
 Sánchez, I. 133, 647  
 Sandmann, G. 1045  
 Sato, F. 563  
 Sator, C. 725  
 Scaysbrook, T. 111  
 Schäfer, H. 398  
 Schaffner, E. M. 194  
 Schaffner, K. 228  
 Scheer, H. 717  
 Scheller, K. 145  
 Schmickler, H. 993  
 Schmid, G. H. 591, 629  
 Schmidt, F. 257  
 Schmidt, M. 197  
 Schmitz, H. 245  
 Schnakenberg, J. 291  
 Schneider, S. 717  
 Schneider-Poetsch, H. A. W. 750  
 Schobel, W. 709  
 Schreiber, U. 233, 635  
 Schreier, P. 395  
 Schröder, H. 527  
 Schubert, V. 33  
 Schuler, P. 67  
 Schulz, D. 197  
 Schuster, W. 709  
 Schwab, E. 395  
 Seinsche, D. 522  
 Sensen, Ch. 750  
 Shaner, D. L. 893  
 Sharma, S. 673  
 Sharma, V. L. 673  
 Shibuya, Y. 513  
 Shimizu, T. 127  
 Shirakura, S. 887  
 Sieweke, H.-J. 585  
 Simantiras, M. 364  
 Singh, S. K. 673  
 Smit, D. 678  
 Sola-Penna, M. 644  
 Soltau, B. 1109  
 Soni, M. 957  
 Spies, H. S. C. 678  
 Spindler, K.-D. 163, 781  
 Spindler-Barth, M. 1089  
 Spörle, J. 183  
 Stärk, A. 989  
 Starke, Th. 613  
 Steffens, J. C. 856  
 Steglich, W. 442, 989  
 Stegmann, H. B. 67  
 Steinmeier, K. 579  
 Stephenson, G. R. 794, 828  
 Stieve, H. 291, 461  
 Stingelin, J. 901  
 Strack, D. 502, 725  
 Strotmann, H. 621  
 Styring, St. 765  
 Suwalsky, M. 133, 647  
 Svensson, B. 765  
  
 Szigeti, Z. 428  
 Szöcs, G. 257  
  
 Tahara, S. 331, 341, 349, 357, 513  
 Takahashi, N. 563  
 Takasugi, M. 189  
 Takeda, N. 127  
 Tanaka, T. 172  
 Tappe, R. 527  
 Taraz, K. 194, 398, 522, 527, 534, 993  
 Têmpete, Ch. 706  
 Tenhaken, R. 51  
 Tiltcher, H. 717  
 Tombor, Á. 815  
 Töth, M. 257  
 Trebst, A. 557  
 Tripathy, B. C. 87  
  
 Ulrich, A. 1063  
 Unselm, M. 709  
 Urbasch, I. 169  
  
 Vass, I. 765  
 Velten, R. 442  
 Vetter, Th. 687  
 Vijayavergiya, V. 87  
 Villand, P. 605  
 Villena, F. 647  
 Vogt, Th. 37  
 Vostrowsky, O. 579  
  
 Wagner, F. 197, 204, 210  
 Wälzlein, G. 1024  
 Waterhouse, J. S. 166  
 Weidner, M. 245  
 Weising, K. 1  
 Wellmann, F. 252  
 Wenzel, M. 789  
 Werner, D. 318  
 Whatley, F. R. 111  
 Wilkinson, R. E. 950  
 Wink, M. 1080  
 Wissinger, B. 709  
 Witt, A. 703  
 Witt, H. T. 1033  
 Witte, L. 519, 725, 1080  
 Wittkampff, U. 58  
 Wokusch, Th. 717  
 Wollenweber, E. 325, 495, 507  
 Wray, V. 197, 204, 725  
  
 Yaacoby, T. 794  
 Yamada, Y. 563  
 Yamamoto, H. 172  
 Yoshida, S. 563  
 Yuyama, T. 887  
  
 Zbiec, I. I. 939  
 Zhi-qing Yang 1003