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Letters

Risks of "natural" additives

In regard to "Wheaty wastes fight rancidity" (SN: 10/17/92, p.270), it may be incorrect to assume that a "natural" chemical substitute for a suspect "artificial" chemical will present a reduced biological risk.

Just because a particular chemical appears in nature, even in an edible plant, does not mean that it is good for humans. The issue should be not the source of the chemical, but whether the human body is designed for regular exposure to it. With regard to the phenol-based BHA and BHT substitute being derived from wheat, many individuals have severe sensitivities to phenols. While clearly there are public health concerns with regard to rancid fat, one should be careful in adopting a new, "natural" additive not to pour the fat from the frying pan into the fire.

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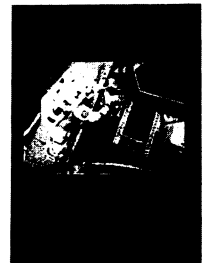
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Cover: Using a water tank to simulate weightlessness, astronauts practice maneuvers for repairing and replacing components on the Hubble Space Telescope. A December shuttle mission to fix Hubble's flawed optics promises to be the grand finale to a challenging year in space. (Photo: NASA, Terry Leibold)



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My personal vote is to avoid both fatty food and additives!

John P. Wikswo

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Out of sleep, out of mind

Since Avi Karni and colleagues in Rehovot, Israel, discovered that interruptions in REM sleep may prevent the permanent establishment of memory ("For a good memory, dream on," SN: 11/14/92, p.333), we can now understand why parents of night-awakening young children feel that they are losing their minds.

Tom Derderian
Winthrop, Mass.

Going native

When you think about it, there really isn't anything native to Hawaii except lava

("Strangers in Paradise," SN: 11/7/92, p.314). The silversword, the fruit flies, the wolf spiders, and the native Hawaiians were all aliens. Over time, as each alien found its niche or ate all its competitors, it became native.

The introduction of alien species into the islands offers an opportunity to study the response of a natural system to such invasion. How the aliens got there is a matter for study, not condemnation. The Australian ant will surely change the islands' ecosystem, but perhaps no more nor less than those species that predated natural science and ecology.

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