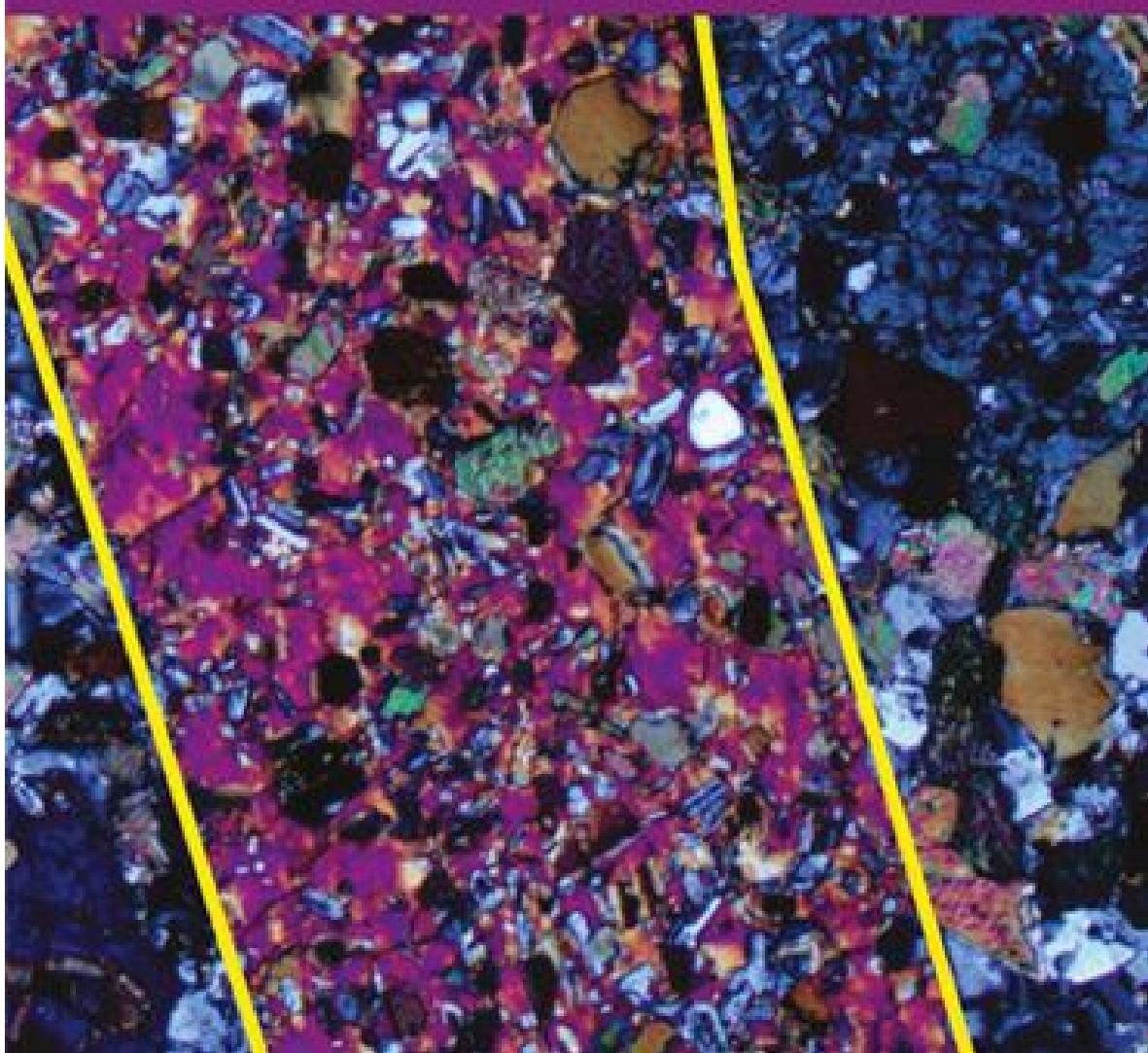


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### Table of contents

**Anais da Academia Brasileira de Ciências, Volume: 93, Issue: 3, Published: 2021**

**Comments on convenience authorship** Editorial Note

KELLNER, ALEXANDER W.A.

Text: EN | PDF: EN

**The 2020 Brazilian Pantanal fires** Letter To The Editor

PLETSCH, MIKHAELA A.J.S.; SILVA JUNIOR, CELSO H.L.; PENHA, THALES V.; KÖRTING, THALES S.; SILVA, MARIA E.S.; PEREIRA, GABRIEL; ANDERSON, LIANA O.; ARAGÃO, LUIZ E.O.C.

Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Testosterone and COVID-19 — a stone in the way** Letter To The Editor

AZEVEDO, PEDRO RICARDO G.; FREITAS, NATÁLIA L. DE; BRANDÃO, FABIANA

Text: EN | PDF: EN

This site uses cookies to ensure you get a better browsing experience. Read our [Privacy Policy](#).  
**The Weibull Burr XII distribution in lifetime and income analysis**

Mathematical Sciences

OK

GUERRA, RENATA ROJAS; PEÑA-RAMÍREZ, FERNANDO A.; CORDEIRO, GAUSS M.

## **Straightforward synthesis of cytosporone analogs AMS35AA and AMS35BB** Chemical Sciences

VITOR, NEIMAR; MEZA, ALISSON; GOMES, ROBERTO S.; RAFIQUE, JAMAL; DE LIMA, DÊNIS P.; BEATRIZ, ADILSON

## **Water-soluble lectin (WSMoL) from *Moringa oleifera* seeds treatment recovers glycemic levels and improves left ventricular ejection fraction on Type-2 Diabetes mice model** Biomedical Sciences

VERA-NUÑEZ, NARENDRA; GUIRAO, AINHOA R.Y.; SILVA, JOSÉ DAYVID F. DA; RAMOS, ISALIRA P.; TORRES, MARÍLIA K.S.; COELHO, LUANA CASSANDRA B.B.; NAPOLEÃO, THIAGO HENRIQUE; PAIVA, PATRÍCIA MARIA G.; MEDEI, EMILIANO

## **Hepato- and cardioprotective effects of *Baccharis trimera* (Less.) DC. against multiple risk factors for chronic noncommunicable diseases**

### Biomedical Sciences

MENDES, TATIANE C.; SILVA, GUSTAVO R. DA; SILVA, ANIELY O.; SCHAEEDLER, MAYSA I.; GUARNIER, LUCAS P.; PALOZI, RHANANY A.C.; SIGNOR, CLEIDE T.; BOSCO, JANAÍNA D. DAL; AUTH, PABLO A.; AMARAL, EDUARDA C.; FROELICH, DIEGO L.; SOARES, ANDRÉIA A.; LOVATO, EVELLYN C.W.; RIBEIRO-PAES, JOÃO T.; GASPAROTTO JUNIOR, ARQUIMEDES; LÍVERO, FRANCISLAINE A. DOS REIS

## **Synthesis of new 1,4-disubstituted 1,2,3-triazoles using the CuAAC reaction and determination of their antioxidant activities**

### Biomedical Sciences

CUNHA LIMA, JOSEFA A. DA; DE FARIA SILVA, JADSON; SANTOS, COSME S.; CAIANA, RODRIGO R.A.; DE MORAES, MARCÍLIO M.; DA CÂMARA, CLAUDIO A.G.; FREITAS, JULIANO C.R.

## **Nuclear and mitochondrial genome instability induced by fractions of ethanolic extract from *Hovenia dulcis* Thunberg in *Saccharomyces cerevisiae* strains** Biomedical Sciences

This site uses cookies to ensure you get a better browsing experience. Read our [Privacy Policy](#).  
ARAÚJO, LUANA B.N. DE; CAL, BRUNA B.F.; NUNES, BRENO M.; CRUZ, LETICIA O. DA; SILVA, CLAUDIA R. DA; CASTRO, TATANAK. DE; LEITÃO, ÁLVARO C.; PÁDULA, MARCELO DE; ALBARELLO, NORMA; DANTAS, FLAVIO J.S.

**A combined injectable contraceptive improves plasma redox status and does not induce vascular changes in female rats** Biomedical Sciences

NERY, LUDMILLA C. DO ESPÍRITO SANTO; BRAZ, LESLIE C.S.; FERREIRA, LETICIA L.D.M.; VIEIRA, FLÁVIA P.; SILVA, LEANDRO L. DA; BLANC, HELENE N.H.; RAIMUNDO, JULIANA M.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Leptin negatively regulates thyroid function of Wistar rats**

Biomedical Sciences

HECHT, FABIO; CAZARIN, JULIANA; ROSSETTI, CAMILA L.; ROSENTHAL, DORIS; ARAUJO, RENATA L.; CARVALHO, DENISE P.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Dynamics of Transmission of Urban Arbovirus Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya in Southwestern Region of Bahia, Brazil** Health Sciences

SOUZA, JOSE HERBERTO M.; BARROS, TÁCITA B.; ALMEIDA, PALLOMA P.; VIEIRA, SUZE C.A.; MELO, FABRÍCIO F.; SILVA, ROBSON A.A.; TOMAZI, LAIZE

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Composition and bioactivity of essential oil from *Stachys macrostachya* (Wend.) Briq** Health Sciences

KARAOGLAN, ESEN SEZEN; GORMEZ, ARZU; YILMAZ, BILAL; KACI, FATMA NECMIYE; OZGEN, UFUK

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**The correct pronunciation of the generic name *Aedes*, to which *Aedes aegypti* belongs** Health Sciences

GIL-SANTANA, HÉLCIO R.; BROCKMANN, ERNST; ALENCAR, JERONIMO

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

***Lutzomyia longipalpis*: an update on this sand fly vector**

Cellular And Molecular Biology

RÊGO, FELIPE D.; SOARES, RODRIGO PEDRO

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

OK

## **Allele Specific Expression (ASE) analysis between Bos Taurus and Bos Indicus cows using RNA-Seq data at SNP level and gene level**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

VARKOOHI, SHEIDA; BANABAZI, MOHAMMAD HOSSEIN; GHSEMI-SIAB, MOJGAN

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **BHLHE40 modulates post-traumatic stress disorder behaviors with the involvement of the PI3K/AKT signaling pathway**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

AJI, ADILA; AIHEMAITI, RENA; ZOU, SHAOHONG; MAISIYITI, ALIMUJIANG; ZHANG, CHENG; LIU, RUONAN; SULIDAN, XIAOKAITI

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Purification and characterization of two new antimicrobial molecules produced by an endophytic strain of *Paenibacillus polymyxa***

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

SERRANO, NADJA F.G.; FERREIRA, DOUGLAS; RODRIGUES-FILHO, EDSON; TEIXEIRA, JOSÉ ANTÓNIO; DUBREUIL, JEAN DANIEL; SOUSA, CRISTINA P. DE

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Characterization of trehalose-6-phosphate synthase and $\text{Na}^+/\text{H}^+$ antiporter genes in *Vuralia turcica* and expression analysis under salt and cadmium stresses**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**  
TEKDAL, DILEK

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **The effect of chitosan addition on cellular uptake and cytotoxicity of ursolic acid niosomes**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

MIATMOKO, ANDANG; HARIAWAN, BERLIAN S.; CAHYANI, DEVY M.; SARI, RETNO; DINARYANTI, ARISTIKA; HENDRIANTO, ERYK

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Beta-1,3-glucanase inhibitors in Brazilian brown seaweed**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

FERREIRA, TAINÁ N.; BARUFI, JOSÉ B.; HORTA, PAULO A.; CASTRO, DANIELE P.;

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN



## **Phylogeography of the neotropical epiphytic orchid, genus Dracula**

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

CERNA, MARCO F.; MORENO, MARIELA M.; FUERTES, BYRON G.; IZA, MARIO L.; MEDINA, GERARDO E.; RECALDE, CELSO G.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **In vitro storage of sweet passion fruit seeds as an innovation conservation alternative** **Cellular And Molecular Biology**

JUNGHANS, TATIANA G.; JESUS, ONILDO N.; SILVA, JAILTON J.; FERREIRA, MICHELE S.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Mitochondrial DNA suggests Hybridization in Freshwater Stingrays *Potamotrygon* (POTAMOTRYGONIDAE: MYLIOBATIFORMES) from the Xingu river, Amazonia and reveals speciation in *Paratrygon aireba***

**Cellular And Molecular Biology**

SANCHES, DAMIRES; MARTINS, THAIS; LUTZ, ÍTALO; VENEZA, IVANA; SILVA, RAIMUNDO DA; ARAÚJO, FELIPE; MURIEL-CUNHA, JANICE; SAMPAIO, IRACILDA; GARCIA, MAGALI; SOUSA, LEANDRO; EVANGELISTA-GOMES, GRAZIELLE

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Gulls as carriers of antimicrobial resistance genes in different biogeographical areas of South America** **Microbiology**

LORENTI, ELIANA; MOREDO, FABIANA; ORIGLIA, JAVIER; DIAZ, JULIA I.; CREMONTE, FLORENCIA; GIACOBONI, GABRIELA

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Determination of antimicrobial and antimutagenic properties of some Schiff bases** **Microbiology**

OGUTCU, HATICE; MERAL, SEHER; CEKER, SELCUK; AGAR, AYSEN ALAMAN; AGAR, GULERAY

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Effects of copper oxide nanoparticles on germination of *Sesbania virgata* (FABACEAE) plants** **Ecosystems**

SANTOS, ELIENE S. DOS; GRACIANO, DANIELA E.; FALCO, WILLIAM F.; CAIRES,

ANDERSON R. LIMA; ARRUDA, EDUARDO J. DE

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

OK

**Decomposition of leaf litter in the Brazilian savanna on limestone and sandstone Neosols Ecosystems**

ALVES, VINÍCIUS N.; BERTIN, DANILA G.; SANTOS, DOUGLAS DA S.; WENDLING, BENO; LANA, REGINA MARIA Q.; TORRES, JOSÉ LUIZ R.; PINHEIRO, MARCELO H.Q.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Distribution and environmental determinants of darkling beetles assemblages (Coleoptera: Tenebrionidae) in Península Valdés (Argentinean Patagonia) Ecosystems**

CHELI, GERMÁN H.; CARRARA, RODOLFO; BANDIERI, LUCAS; FLORES, GUSTAVO E.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Seasonal diet variation, preferences and availability of resources consumed by *Sturnira lilium* (É. Geoffroy St.-Hilaire, 1810) (Chiroptera: Phyllostomidae) in Brazilian seasonal deciduous forest Ecosystems**

JACOMASSA, FÁBIO A.F.; BERNARDI, ITIBERÊ P.; PASSOS, FERNANDO DE C.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Parasites in *Leporinus macrocephalus* (Anostomidae) of four fish farms from the western Amazon (Brazil) Ecosystems**

NEGREIROS, LUCIANO P.; NEVES, LIGIA R.; TAVARES-DIAS, MARCOS

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Classification of homogeneous regions of vegetation cover in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil and its temporal dynamics, using AVHRR GIMMS and MODIS data sets Ecosystems**

CORDEIRO, ANA PAULA A.; ALVES, RITA DE CÁSSIA M.; STEFFLER, ANA PAULA L.W.; MENGUE, VAGNER P.; FONTANA, DENISE C.; ROGLIO, VINICIUS S.; GUASSELLI, LAURINDO A.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Transplanting macrophytes as a rehabilitation technique for lowland streams and their influence on macroinvertebrate assemblages Ecosystems**

ALTIERI, PAULA; PAZ, LAURA E.; JENSEN, ROBERTO F.; DONADELLI, JORGE;

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Native and non-native species of *Litopenaeus* Pérez-Farfante, 1969  
(Crustacea: Penaeidae) from the East Atlantic: Geometric  
morphometrics as a tool for taxonomic discrimination** Ecosystems  
MORAES, ALEX B. DE; DE MORAES, DANIELE C.S.; ALENCAR, CARLOS EDUARDO R.D.;  
FREIRE, FÚLVIO A.M.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **On the Dental Formulae of Brazilian Terrestrial Carnivora (Mammalia)**

Ecosystems

GUDINHO, FILIPE S.; WEKSLER, MARCELO

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## ***Teissiera polypofera*: first record of the genus *Teissiera* (Hydrozoa: Anthoathecata) in the Atlantic Ocean** Ecosystems

TOSETTO, EVERTON G.; NEUMANN-LEITÃO, SIGRID; BERTRAND, ARNAUD; NOGUEIRA-JÚNIOR, MIODELI

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Is it possible to use behavior characters for evolutionary reconstruction in marine invertebrates? A methodological approach using Ethokit Logger** Ecosystems

DE GODOY, ISABELA A.; ALBERTS, CARLOS C.; NESPOLO, CAIO H.; OLIVEIRA, JULIANA  
DE; STAMPAR, SÉRGIO N.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Effect of fine-scale habitat differences on algal colonisation in a coral- dominated subtropical reef** Ecosystems

DE CARVALHO, LEONARDO L.; VILLAÇA, ROBERTO C.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Species diversity of Tenebrionidae (Coleoptera) in mountaintops of extra-Andean volcanoes of Payunia (Argentina), with descriptions of two new species** Ecosystems

CARRARA, RODOLFO; CHELI, GERMÁN H.; SILVESTRO, VIOLETA A.; ROIG-JUÑENT,  
SERGIO; FLORES, GUSTAVO E.

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

OK

## **The first record of *Centrocestus formosanus* (Trematoda: Heterophyidae) in southern Brazil supported by molecular data**

Ecosystems

CICCHETO, JULIANA R.M.; STABILE, BRUNO H.M.; FABRIN, THOMAZ M.C.; OLIVEIRA, ALESSANDRA V. DE; TAKEMOTO, RICARDO M.; GRAÇA, RODRIGO J. DA

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Peripampasic Arc: a route of dispersion for lichens Ecosystems**

GARCÍA, RENATO A.; PALACIO, ALEJANDRO DEL

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **High-resolution semi-automatic mapping based on an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to capture geological structures Geosciences**

MOREIRA, JULIO A.; OLIVEIRA, FABRICIA B. DE; OLIVEIRA, CARLOS H.R. DE; FIGUEIREDO, ALVARO C.; FILHO, MAURO C.L.; DUARTE, EDUARDO B.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Comparing explosive cyclogenesis cases of different intensities occurred in Southern Atlantic Geosciences**

AVILA, VILSON D. DE; NUNES, ANDRÉ B.; ALVES, RITA DE CÁSSIA M.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Chemical classification of common volcanic rocks based on degree of silica saturation and CaO/K<sub>2</sub>O ratio Geosciences**

SANTOS, JOÃO O.S.; HARTMANN, LÉO A.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Petrologic and geochronological constraints on the polymetamorphic evolution of the collisional granites, Araçuaí Orogen (SE Brazil)**

Geosciences

MAURI, SANDRO; MELO, MARILANE G.; LANA, CRISTIANO; MARQUES, RODSON A.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Nutritional performance and metabolic characteristics of cattle fed**

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tropical forages with protein and starch supplementation Animal Science

FRANCO, MARCIA O.; DETMANN, EDENIO; BATISTA, ERICK D.; RUFINO, LUANA M.A.; PAULINO, MARIO F.; VALADARES FILHO, SEBASTIÃO C.

**Safflower seed supplementation in lamb feed: effects upon fatty acid profile and quality of meat patty formulations** Animal Science

OLIVEIRA, MITALLY RAYANA C. DE; ECHEVERRIA, LARISSA; MARTINEZ, ANTONIO C.; GOES, RAFAEL HENRIQUE T.B. DE; SCANAVACCA, JULIANA; BARROS, BEATRIZ C.B.

**Key roles of paternal care and climate on offspring survival of an Amazonian poison frog** Animal Science

ROCHA, SULAMITA M.C. DA; LIMA, ALBERTINA PIMENTEL; KAEFER, IGOR LUIS

**Detection of virulence genes and antimicrobial susceptibility profile of *Listeria monocytogenes* isolates recovered from artisanal cheese produced in the Southern region of Brazil** Animal Science

PARUSSOLO, LEANDRO; SFACIOTTE, RICARDO ANTÔNIO P.; DALMINA, KARINE ANDREZZA; MELO, FERNANDA DANIELLE; COSTA, UBIRAJARA M. DA; FERRAZ, SANDRA MARIA

**High-concentrate diets with fibrous by-products for feedlot Nellore heifers** Animal Science

CLEEF, ERIC H.C.B. VAN; OLIVEIRA, PRISCILA S.N. DE; GALATI, ROSEMARY LAÍS; FERREIRA, DANIEL S.; SANTOS, VIVIANE C.; HOMEM JUNIOR, ANTÔNIO CARLOS; PEREIRA JUNIOR, SERGIO ANTÔNIO G.; PARDO, RENÉ MAURICIO P.; EZEQUIEL, JANE MARIA B.

**Influence of creep feeder position on the behavior and performance of preweaning piglets and sows in a hot climate environment**

Animal Science

OLIVEIRA, EWERSON S.; NASCIMENTO, ELAINE L.L.; LIMA, HELLEN K.S.; NEVES, JACQUELINE S.; DAMASCENO, JAMILLY G.; SILVA, JULIANA C.; OLIVEIRA, NATÁLIA C.; NASCIMENTO, PEDRO H.; OLIVEIRA, RAFAEL A.; ARAÚJO, VITOR O.; VIEIRA, MARIA F.A.; MONTEIRO, BRUNO M.; SCHINCKEL, ALLAN P.; GARBOSSA, CESAR A.P.

## **Effect of different cryopreservation extenders added with antioxidants on semen quality and *in vitro* embryo production efficiency in cattle**

**Animal Science**

SILVA, NATALIA C.; LEÃO, KAREN M.; PÁDUA, JOÃO T.; MARQUES, THAISA C.; NETO, FRANCISCO R.A.; DODE, MARGOT A.N.; CUNHA, ANDRIELLE T.M.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Starter bacteria as producers of CLA in ripened cheese** Animal Science

OLIVO, PAULA M.; DOS SANTOS, GERALDO TADEU; RODRIGUES, BRUNA M.; OSMARI, MILENE P.; MARCHI, FRANCILAINÉ ELOISE DE; MADRONA, GRASIELE S.; AGOSTINHO, BRUNA C.; POZZA, MAGALI S.S.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Effect of chromium yeast supplementation on lipid profile of swine fat**

**Animal Science**

ALENCAR, STEPHAN A.S.; KIEFER, CHARLES; NASCIMENTO, KARINA M.R.S; VIANA, LUIZ HENRIQUE; CORASSA, ANDERSON; RODRIGUES, GABRIELA P.; SILVA, CAMILLA M.; CAVALHEIRO, LEANDRO F.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Richness and distribution of the meliponine fauna (Hymenoptera: Apidae: Meliponini) in the State of Ceará, Brazil** Animal Science

FELIX, JÂNIO A.; FREITAS, BRENO M.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Plant growth regulators to increase fruit set and yield of 'Rocha' pear trees in Southern Brazil** Crop Science

CARRA, BRUNO; PASA, MATEUS S.; ABREU, EVERTON S.; DINI, MAXIMILIANO; PASA, CARINA P.; CIOTTA, MARLISE N.; HERTER, FLAVIO G.; MELLO-FARIAS, PAULO

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

## **Increased atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> combined with local climatic variation affects phenolics and spider mite populations in coffee trees**

Crop Science

BATISTA, EUNICE R.; MARINHO-PRADO, JEANNE S.; MINEIRO, JEFERSON L.C.; SATO, MÁRIO E.; LUIZ, ALFREDO J.B.; FRIGHETTO, ROSA T.S.

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Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

OK

**Chemical composition and insecticidal activity of the essential oils of *Piper marginatum*, *Piper callosum* and *Vitex agnus-castus*** *Crop Science*  
AYRES, VANESSA F.S.; OLIVEIRA, MIDIÃ R.; BALDIN, EDSON L.L.; CORRÊA, GEONE M.; GUIMARÃES, ANDERSON C.; TAKEARA, RENATA

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Differential defense responses of tropical grasses to *Mahanarva spectabilis* (Hemiptera: Cercopidae) infestation** *Crop Science*

BARROS, RAFAEL DE A.; VITAL, CAMILO E.; JÚNIOR, NEILIER R.S.; VARGAS, MANUEL A.S.; MONTEIRO, LUANA P.; FAUSTINO, VERÔNICA A.; AUAD, ALEXANDER M.; PEREIRA, JORGE F.; OLIVEIRA, EUGÊNIO E. DE; RAMOS, HUMBERTO J.O.; OLIVEIRA, MARIA GORETI DE A.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Light quality and sealing type affect in vitro growth and development of *Capsicum frutescens* cultivars** *Crop Science*

GRIS, TAINARA; PINHEIRO, MARCOS V.M.; THIESSEN, LEONARDO A.; WEBLER, ANDERSON R.; JUNGES, DIÉSSICA L.; HOLZ, EVANDRO; NAIBO, IURI; BATISTA, DIEGO S.; OTONI, WAGNER C.; SCHMIDT, DENISE

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Structure and diversity of bacterial community in semiarid soils cultivated with prickly-pear cactus (*Opuntia ficus-indica* (L.) Mill.)**

**Soil Science**

LYRA, MARIA DO CARMO C.P. DE; TAKETANI, RODRIGO G.; FREITAS, ANA DOLORES S. DE; SILVA, CAROLINA E.R.S. E; MERGULHÃO, ADÁLIA C.E.S.; SILVA, MARIA LUIZA R.B. DA; ANTUNES, JADSON E.L.S.; ARAÚJO, ADEMIR S.F. DE; GIACCHETTO, POLIANA F.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Biological activity of bacteria isolated from wetland sediments collected from a conservation unit in the southern region of Brazil**

**Soil Science**

JANKOSKI, PRISCILA R.; CORREA, ANA PAULA F.; BRANDELLI, ADRIANO; MOTTA, AMANDA S. DA

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

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**Evaluation of the agricultural potentials of the serpentinite rock as a soil remineralizer** *Soil Science*

OK

VIANA, JOÃO H.M.; COELHO, ANTÔNIO M.; THOMAZINI, ANDRÉ; CARVALHO, MATHEUS P.F. DE

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Spatial variability of the nutritional status and the leaf chlorophyll index of from rubber tree Forestry Science**

LIMA, JULIÃO S.S.; ALTOÉ, MARCELO S.; SILVA, SAMUEL A.; FONSECA, ABEL S.; MEDAUAR, CAÍQUE C.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Influence of different relief information sources on the geomorphological characterization of small watersheds**

**Engineering Sciences**

MOURA, MAÍRA M. DE; BESKOW, SAMUEL; TERRA, FABRÍCIO S.; MELLO, CARLOS ROGÉRIO DE; CUNHA, ZANDRA A. DA; CASSALHO, FELÍCIO

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Influence of hemodialysis blood flow rate on the thrombogenic potential in patients with central venous catheters Engineering Sciences**

HANIEL, JONATHAS; LUCAS, THABATA C.; SILVA, MÁRIO LUIS F. DA; GOMES, VÍTOR S.; HUEBNER, RUDOLF

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Assessment of spatial variability of bedding variables in compost bedded pack barns with climate control system Engineering Sciences**

OLIVEIRA, CARLOS EDUARDO A.; DAMASCENO, FLÁVIO A.; FERRAZ, GABRIEL A.S.; NASCIMENTO, JOÃO ANTÔNIO C. DO; VEGA, FELIPE A.O.; TINÔCO, ILDA F.F.; ANDRADE, RAFAELLA R.

Abstract: EN | Text: EN | PDF: EN

**Mechanical and electrical properties of MWCNTs - high early strength cement - mortars composite: Dispersion of CNTs and effect of chemical admixtures Engineering Sciences**

GARCÍA, VÍCTOR J.; MÁRQUEZ, CARMEN O.; ZÚÑIGA-SUÁREZ, ALONSO R.; ZÚÑIGA-TORRES, BERENICE C.; RÍOS-GÓNZALEZ, PEDRO J

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## CELLULAR AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY

# The effect of chitosan addition on cellular uptake and cytotoxicity of ursolic acid niosomes

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ARISTIKA DINARYANTI & ERYK HENDRIANTO

**Abstract:** This study evaluated the cellular uptake and cytotoxicity of low permeable Ursolic acid (UA) on cancer cells using niosomes composed of span 60 and cholesterol. The results showed that the addition of chitosan increased particle sizes and  $\zeta$ -potentials. The UA niosomes with chitosan layers had higher cytotoxicity in HeLa cells than without chitosan, however, there was no improvement observed for Huh7it cells. Moreover, chitosan layers improved the cellular uptake, which clathrin-mediated endocytosis may determine the cellular transport of UA niosomes. In conclusion, the addition of chitosan improved cellular uptake and cytotoxicity of UA niosomes in the HeLa cells.

**Key words:** Chitosan, niosomes, ursolic acid, cytotoxicity, cell uptake, cancer.

## INTRODUCTION

Ursolic acid (UA) is a pentacyclic triterpene which promotes anti-cancer activity in humans (Ali et al. 2019). They revealed the role of UA in accelerating liver proliferation, restoring biochemical and histological functions in liver cells damaged by hepatocarcinoma, and protecting the integrity of hepatocytes against liver damage.

The use of UA in anti-cancer therapy has drawbacks related to its poor permeability and water solubility. Lawsone, an anti-cancer drug that demonstrates poor solubility and permeability, is reported to induce high cytotoxicity when in the form of niosomes (Barani et al. 2018). The increased cytotoxic effect was due to the internalization effect of the niosomes in MCF-7 breast cancer cells which was superior to that of the free form and the resulting sustained-release effect.

Research conducted by Song et al. (2014) shows that the mechanism transporting

niosomes into cells is active and linked to the endocytosis pathway. Chitosan, a natural polysaccharide (Szymańska & Winnicka 2015) and a cationic polymer, has been shown to increase cell uptake (Li et al. 2013, Zhang et al. 2013). The cationic polymer charge significantly affects cellular absorption *in vitro* (Li & Ju 2017) due to the electrostatic interaction between cells and positively charged cationic polymers.

Against this background, research was carried out on cell uptake and *in vitro* cytotoxicity of UA niosomes with chitosan coating on HeLa and Huh7it cells (Guo et al. 2019, Purnamasari et al. 2019).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, UA niosomes (Nio-UA) was composed of Span 60, Cholesterol, UA at a molar ratio of 6:4:1, respectively. A solution of UA, Span 60, and Cholesterol was mixed in a round bottom flask, then the organic solvents

was evaporated until a thin lipid film was formed. This film was hydrated using Phosphate buffered saline solution pH 7.4. Furthermore, a solution of 0.005% w/v chitosan was added for producing Nio-UA-CS.

The particle size and  $\zeta$ -potential were measured by means of dynamic and electrophoresis light scattering method, respectively, by the use of a Delsa™ Nano C Particle Analyzer at 25°C.

A cytotoxicity test was performed using an MTT (3-(4,5-Dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide) assay on HeLa and Huh7it cells after incubating Nio-UA and Nio-UA-CS for 48 hours. The absorbance of MTT was measured at  $\lambda$ : 560 and 750 nm using a GloMax-Multi Microplate Multimode Reader (Promega).

Furthermore, the cell uptake test was carried out on HeLa cells after incubating the UA niosomes labeled Coumarin-6 (Cou-6= 10  $\mu$ g/mL). In order to determine the mechanism of cell uptake, pre-incubation was carried out with endocytosis specific inhibitors, namely; 200  $\mu$ M of genistein and 450 mM of sucrose. Pre-incubation was performed on sucrose for one hour and on genistein for 30 minutes at 37°C. After pre-incubation, the media was replaced with 10  $\mu$ g/mL of coumarin 6-labeled UA niosomes in the medium and incubated for two hours at 37°C. The fluorescence intensity of Coumarin-6 in the cells was measured at  $\lambda_{ex}$ : 475 nm and  $\lambda_{em}$ : 500-550 nm using the Glomax

Microplate Reader. The cell uptake was also evaluated by using a fluorescence microscope.

For statistical analysis, significance was indicated by  $P<0.05$  by using one-way analysis of variance followed by a least significant difference test.

## RESULTS

The data shown in Table I indicates that the particle size of Nio-UA-CS was larger than that of Nio-UA. Similarly, for niosomes labeled with coumarin, the size of Nio-UA-CS-Cou6 was greater than that of Nio-UA-Cou6. The cytotoxicity results show that the  $IC_{50}$  Nio-UA was higher than that of  $IC_{50}$  Nio-UA-CS in HeLa cells (Figure 1a). Thus, chitosan coating can increase the cytotoxicity of UA niosomes with regard to HeLa cells; however, the Huh7it cells were less sensitive to UA than HeLa cells as shown in Figure 1b.

Observations were further conducted using a fluorosense microscope after HeLa cells had been treated with UA niosomes for two hours. It can be seen in Figure 2 that the Coumarin-6 intensity of the Nio-UA-CS was higher than that of Nio-UA. Moreover, the appearance of cells in the treatment of Nio-UA indicates that Nio-UA slightly entered the cell and still mainly remained in the membrane, while Nio-UA-CS appear evenly across the cell membrane and were accumulated highly inside the cells. The Figure 2 also show that after genistein

**Table I.** Physical characteristics of Nio-UA, Nio-UA-CS, Nio-UA-Cou6, and Nio-UA-CS-Cou6.

Parameter	Nio-UA	Nio-UA-CS	Nio-UA-Cou6	Nio-UA-CS-Cou6
Particle Size (nm)	198.7±13.8	237.7±6.2	163.0±5.3	203.6±6.7
$\zeta$ -Potential (mV)	-57.5±11.9	3.88±1.5	-64.8±0.2	-45.7±7.6
Polydispersity index	0.29±0.02	0.33±0.03	0.16±0.03	0.22±0.09

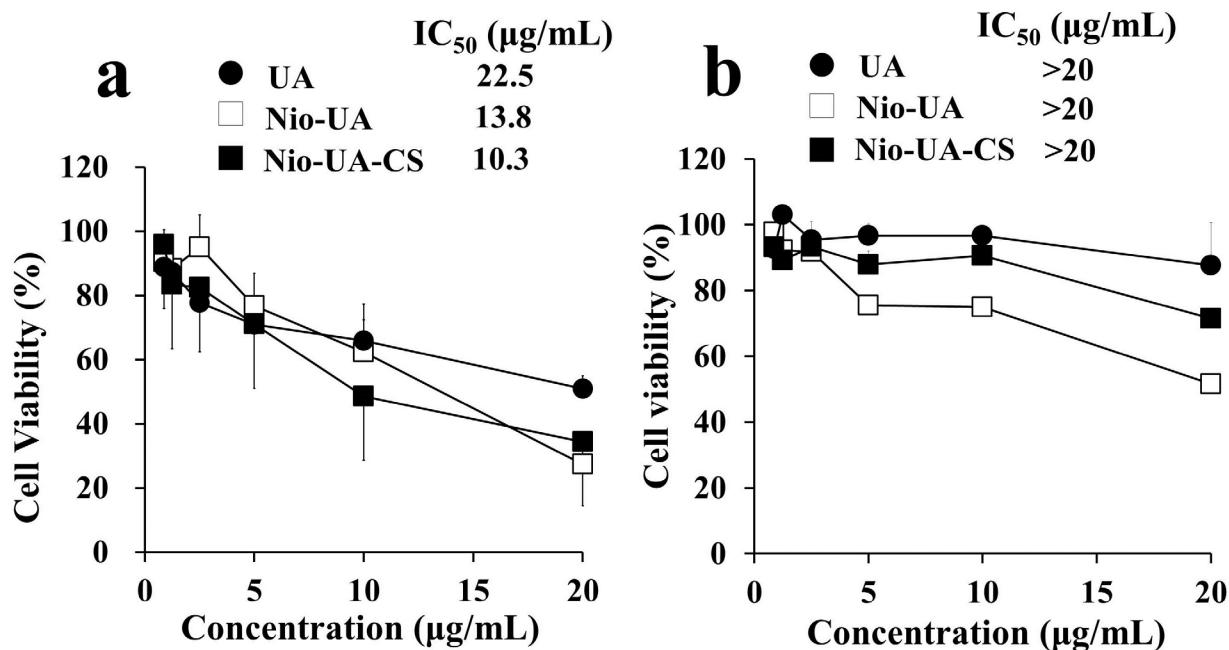
pretreatment as transport inhibitor of Nio-UA, the cells had less intense fluorescence than that of sucrose pretreatment. On the contrary, the cells treated Nio-UA-CS had a higher intensity than that without the addition of the inhibitor, and with the addition of sucrose, these cells had relatively lower intensities than that of genistein addition.

To determine the cellular uptake mechanism of the niosome, a test was carried out involving the addition of specific endocytosis inhibitors i.e. sucrose and genistein. As in Figure 3, with the addition of genistein or sucrose as an endocytosis inhibitor of the caveolae or clathrin pathway, respectively, the Nio-UA demonstrated relatively similar levels than the Nio-UA without inhibitor. The contrast results were produced by the Nio-UA-CS, which without inhibitor, it had significant lower levels than Nio-UA-CS with the genistein.

## DISCUSSION

Following the research conducted into the increase in particle size and changes in the  $\zeta$ -potential value, it can be argued that chitosan layers on niosomes induce this change (Aquila 2018). The chitosan layer may be formed by electrostatic interactions increasing in particle size (Guo et al. 2003). In the niosome, ionic attraction occurs between the ammonium group of chitosan and the phosphate group of phospholipids or other negatively charged groups in lipids (Frank et al. 2020). This interaction also causes changes in the  $\zeta$ -potential of the niosome as shown in Table I where the  $\zeta$ -potential value becomes positive after niosome coating.

In this study, HeLa and Huh7it cells had different sensitivity for cytotoxic study of UA and niosomes since each cell type has specific biological characteristics devoted for certain functions (von Gersdorff et al. 2006). The decrease in the  $IC_{50}$  value of UA niosomes with

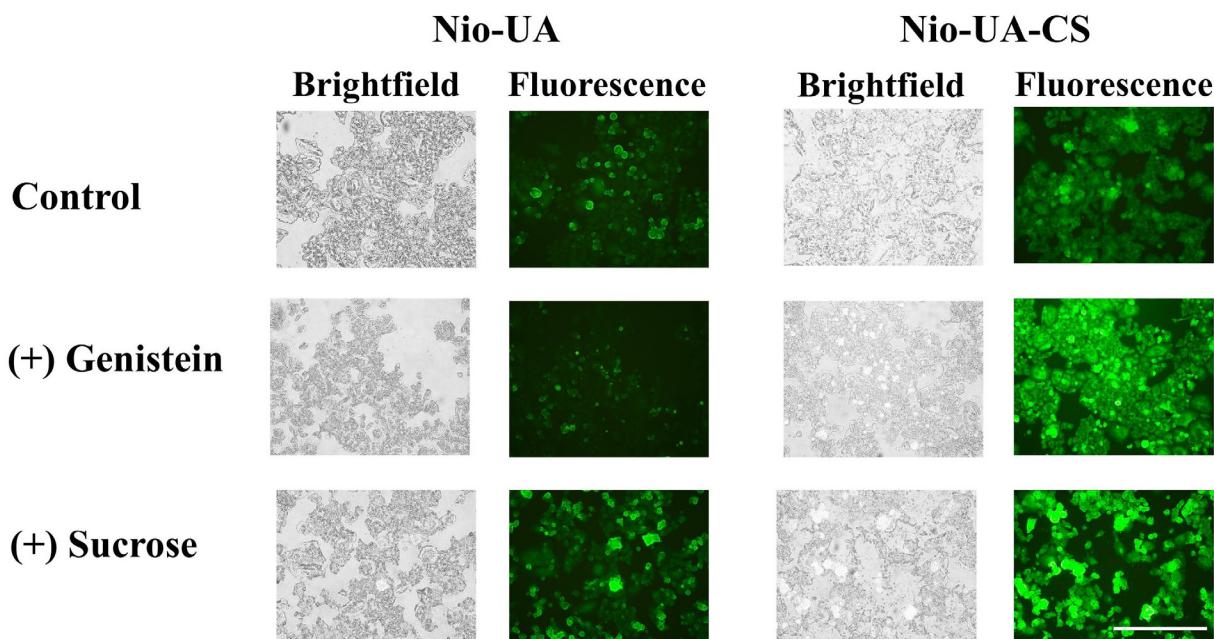


**Figure 1.** Viability of HeLa (a) and Huh7it (b) cells in the presence of UA, Nio-UA and Nio UA-CS treatment after incubation for 48 hours at various concentrations.

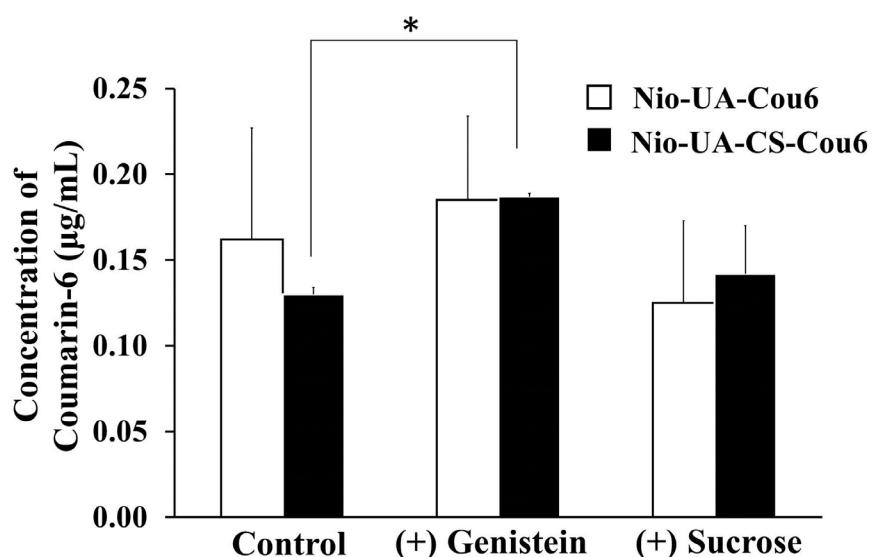
chitosan coating compared to UA niosomes is in accordance with the research findings of Ahmed et al. (2017) regarding the higher absorption of poly L-lysine silver nanoparticles than silver nanoparticles due to the interaction between positively charged poly L-lysine on the surface of the nanoparticles and the negatively charged HepG2 hepatoblastoma cell surface. In chitosan, the positive surface charge can increase the bio-nano interaction with negative surface charge of the cytoplasmic membrane resulting in an increase in cell uptake and cytotoxicity (Frank et al. 2020).

The photomicrographs of cellular uptake confirms that the niosome as a cell retrieval carrier accumulates on the surface during the cell uptake process (Kaksonen & Roux 2018). Since the addition of genistein produces higher yields, it clearly affects cell uptake from Nio-UA-CS (Quagliariello et al. 2019). Hence, the entry of Nio-UA-CS was improved with the presence of genistein as the inhibitor

of the caveolae-mediated endocytosis, but no significant difference was observed after addition of sucrose. From these results, it can be concluded that Nio-UA-CS undergoes cell uptake through the clathrin-mediated endocytosis pathway, while the mechanism of Nio-UA uptake may involve both mechanisms. This finding is in accordance with that of Quagliariello's research from 2019 that cell uptake from Butyric acid in liposomes occurs through clathrin-mediated endocytosis whose mechanism is initiated when the endocytic protein layer of the cytosol clusters on the plasma membrane. After the coating is formed, the uptake molecules are concentrated in the layer area and a bond occurs which results in the flat plasma membrane becoming a 'clathrin-layered hole' containing the uptake molecules. Furthermore, the process of constriction and cutting of the neck membrane occurs with the result that the vesicles enter the cell (Kaksonen & Roux 2018).



**Figure 2.** Photomicrographs of cellular uptake of HeLa cells after incubated with Nio-UA and Nio-UA-CS containing Coumarin-6 for two hours without and with addition of genistein and sucrose pre-treatment. Scale bar= 100  $\mu$ m.



**Figure 3.** Coumarin-6 levels in HeLa cells after incubation with Nio-UA and Nio-UA-CS for two hours without and with addition of genistein and sucrose pre-treatment (\* $P<0.05$ ).

## CONCLUSION

It can be seen from this study that the UA niosome with chitosan layers increased cytotoxicity in HeLa cells but it was less sensitive for Huh7it cells. The difference in cell uptake between Nio-UA and Nio-UA-CS should also be investigated at greater length in order to identify the effect of chitosan addition on cellular uptake pathways.

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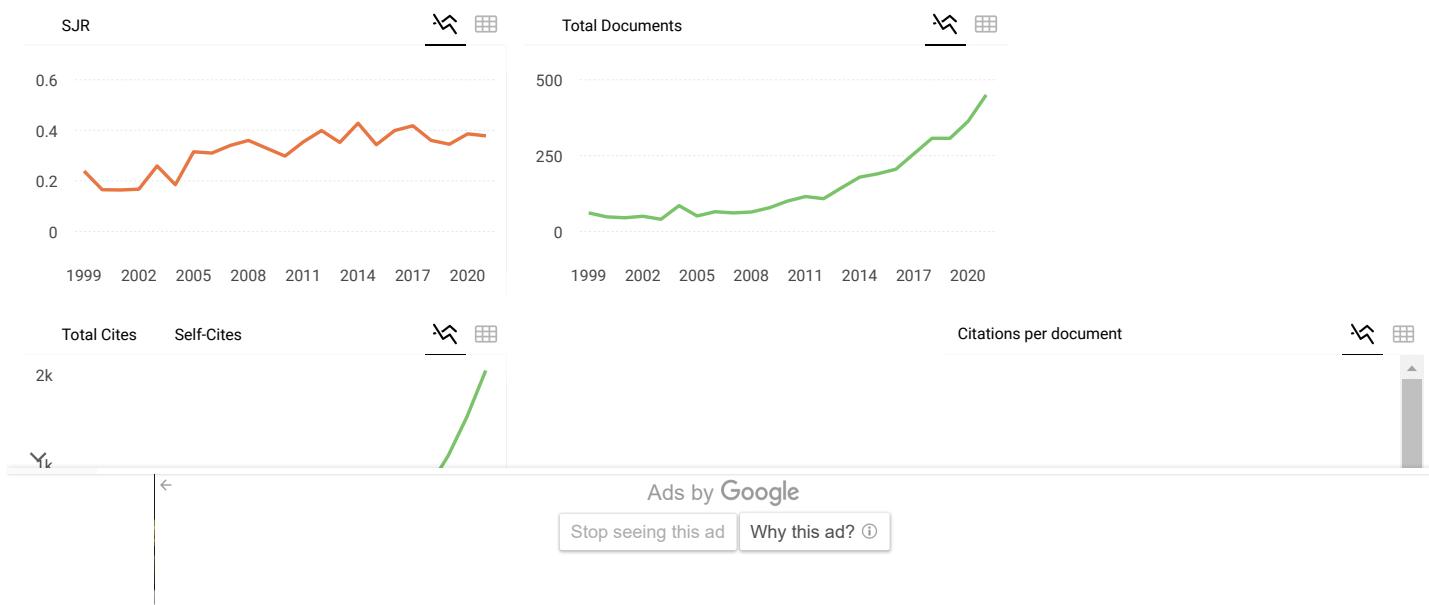
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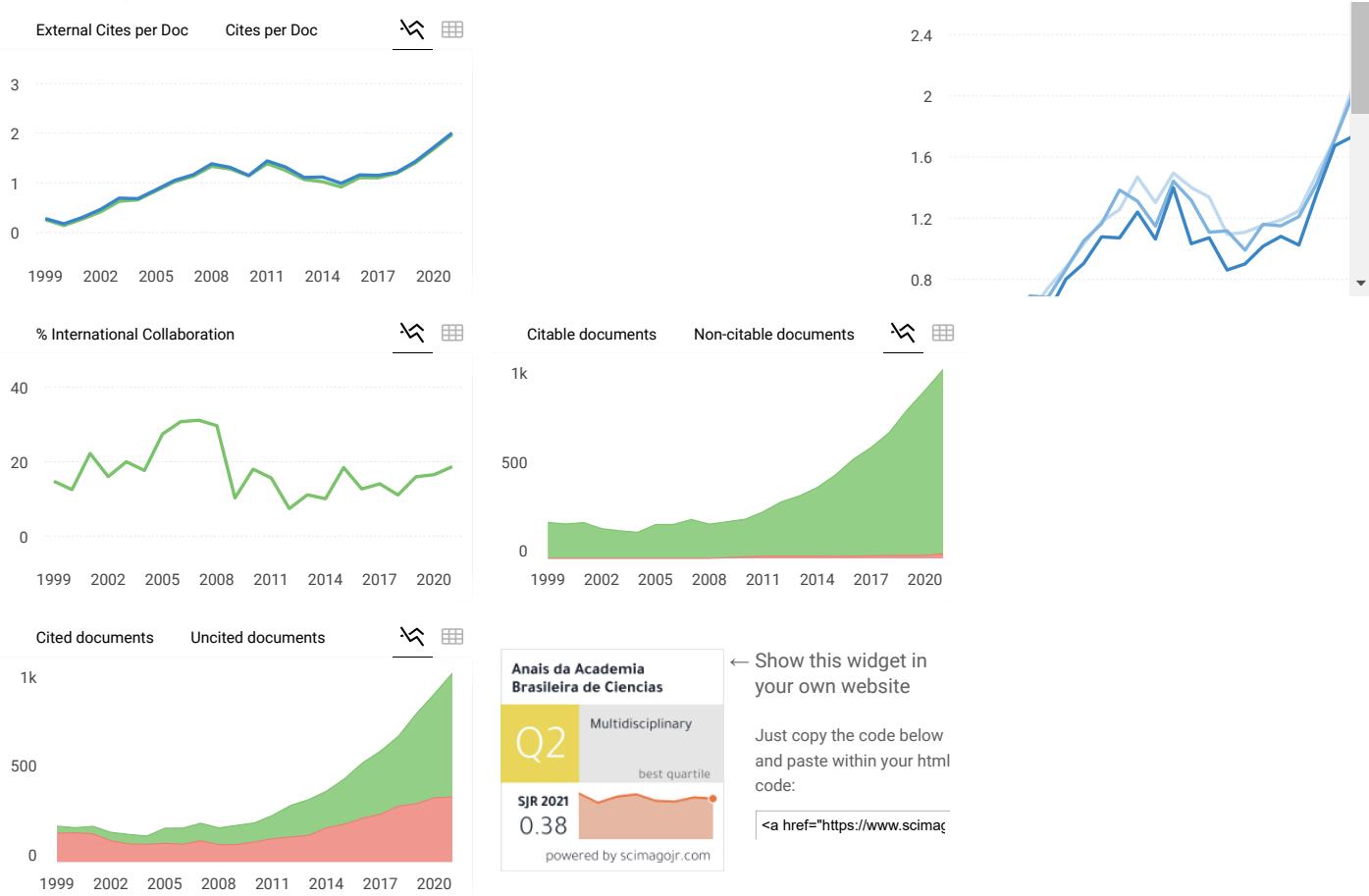
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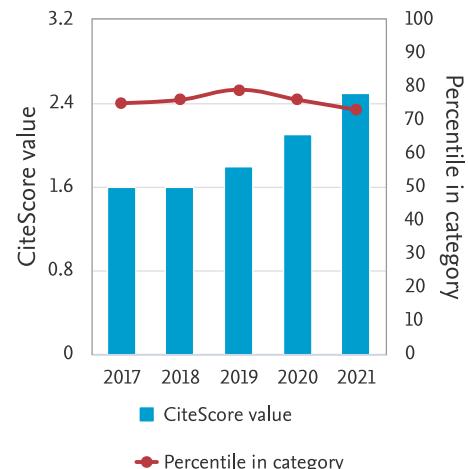
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☆ #44	Universitas Scientiarum	1.6	63rd percentile
☆ #45	Springer Handbooks	1.6	62nd percentile
☆ #46	Perspectives on Science	1.6	62nd percentile
☆ #47	Latin American Research Review	1.5	61st percentile
☆ #48	Journal of Scientific and Industrial Research	1.4	60th percentile
☆ #49	Journal of Shanghai Jiaotong University (Science)	1.4	59th percentile
☆ #50	Fundamental Research	1.4	58th percentile
☆ #51	World Review of Science, Technology and Sustainable Development	1.3	57th percentile
☆ #52	Journal of the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka	1.3	57th percentile
☆ #53	Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society	1.3	56th percentile
☆ #54	Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia	1.3	55th percentile
☆ #55	Brazilian Archives of Biology and Technology	1.3	54th percentile
☆ #56	Science Progress	1.2	53rd percentile
☆ #57	Xinan Jiaotong Daxue Xuebao/Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University	1.1	52nd percentile
☆ #58	Gazi University Journal of Science	1.1	52nd percentile
☆ #59	Maejo International Journal of Science and Technology	1.1	51st percentile
☆ #60	Historia Agraria	1.1	50th percentile
☆ #61	ScienceAsia	1.0	49th percentile

Rank	Source title	CiteScore 2021	Percentile
☆ #62	Jilin Daxue Xuebao (Gongxueban)/Journal of Jilin University (Engineering and Technology Edition)	1.0	48th percentile
☆ #63	Tongji Daxue Xuebao/Journal of Tongji University	0.9	47th percentile
☆ #64	Tianjin Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue yu Gongcheng Jishu Ban)/Journal of Tianjin University Science and Technology	0.9	47th percentile
☆ #65	Beijing Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue Ban)/Acta Scientiarum Naturalium Universitatis Pekinensis	0.9	46th percentile
☆ #66	Songklanakarin Journal of Science and Technology	0.9	45th percentile
☆ #67	Movement and Sports Sciences - Science et Motricite	0.9	44th percentile
☆ #68	Hunan Daxue Xuebao/Journal of Hunan University Natural Sciences	0.9	43rd percentile
☆ #69	Journal of Applied Science and Engineering (Taiwan)	0.9	42nd percentile
☆ #70	Interciencia	0.9	42nd percentile
☆ #71	Wuhan University Journal of Natural Sciences	0.9	41st percentile
☆ #72	AAS Open Research	0.9	40th percentile
☆ #73	Philippine Journal of Science	0.8	39th percentile
☆ #74	Malaysian Journal of Science	0.8	38th percentile
☆ #75	Walailak Journal of Science and Technology	0.8	37th percentile
☆ #76	International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies	0.8	37th percentile
☆ #77	Vibroengineering Procedia	0.7	36th percentile
☆ #78	Archives des Sciences	0.7	35th percentile
☆ #79	Journal of Sciences, Islamic Republic of Iran	0.7	34th percentile
☆ #80	Comptes Rendus de L'Academie Bulgare des Sciences	0.7	33rd percentile
☆ #81	Shanghai Jiaotong Daxue Xuebao/Journal of Shanghai Jiaotong University	0.7	32nd percentile
☆ #82	Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences	0.7	32nd percentile
☆ #83	International Journal of Language and Culture	0.7	31st percentile
☆ #84	Constructivist Foundations	0.6	30th percentile

Rank	Source title	CiteScore 2021	Percentile
☆ #85	Proceedings of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Section B: Natural, Exact, and Applied Sciences	0.6	29th percentile
☆ #86	Psychotherapy and Politics International	0.6	28th percentile
☆ #87	Xi'an Shiyu Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue Ban)/Journal of Xi'an Shiyu University, Natural Sciences Edition	0.6	27th percentile
☆ #88	Papers and Proceedings - Royal Society of Tasmania	0.6	27th percentile
☆ #89	Shenyang Jianzhu Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue Ban)/Journal of Shenyang Jianzhu University (Natural Science)	0.6	26th percentile
☆ #90	ASM Science Journal	0.5	25th percentile
☆ #91	Bulletin de la Societe Royale des Sciences de Liege	0.5	24th percentile
☆ #92	Ohio Journal of Sciences	0.5	23rd percentile
☆ #93	Scientific American	0.5	22nd percentile
☆ #94	Science and Technology Asia	0.5	22nd percentile
☆ #95	Zhongshan Daxue Xuebao/Acta Scientiarum Natralium Universitatis Sunyatseni	0.5	21st percentile
☆ #96	Journal of Zhejiang University, Science Edition	0.4	20th percentile
☆ #97	Science, Engineering and Health Studies	0.4	19th percentile
☆ #98	Acta Scientiae	0.4	18th percentile
☆ #99	Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering and Science	0.4	17th percentile
☆ #100	Mindanao Journal of Science and Technology	0.4	17th percentile
☆ #101	Metode	0.4	16th percentile
☆ #102	Liaoning Gongcheng Jishu Daxue Xuebao (Ziran Kexue Ban)/Journal of Liaoning Technical University (Natural Science Edition)	0.4	15th percentile
☆ #103	Journal and Proceedings - Royal Society of New South Wales	0.3	14th percentile
☆ #104	Journal of Current Science and Technology	0.3	13th percentile
☆ #105	International Journal of Systematic Innovation	0.3	12th percentile
☆ #106	Know	0.3	12th percentile
☆ #107	Revista Lasallista de Investigacion	0.3	11th percentile

Rank	Source title	CiteScore 2021	Percentile
★ #108	Chinese Annals of History of Science and Technology	0.2	10th percentile
★ #109	Scientific Journal of King Faisal University Basic and Applied Sciences	0.2	9th percentile
★ #110	Proceedings of Science	0.2	8th percentile
★ #111	New Scientist	0.2	7th percentile
★ #112	European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies	0.2	7th percentile
★ #113	Revista Conhecimento Online	0.1	6th percentile
★ #114	International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences	0.1	5th percentile
★ #115	Radovi Zavoda za Znanstvenostrazivacki i Umjetnicki Rad u Bjelovaru	0.1	4th percentile
★ #116	Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology	0.1	3rd percentile
★ #117	Advanced Topics in Science and Technology in China	0.1	2nd percentile
★ #118	Trends in Sciences	0.0	2nd percentile
★ #119	Israa University Journal of Applied Science	0.0	0th percentile
★ #119	Taiwan Review	0.0	0th percentile

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