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Quick Crystals

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include: Wayne Welch (Inquiry), Rodger Bybee (Biology), David Ost (Science/Technology/Society), Harold Pratt (Elementary Science), and Norris Harms (Physical Science).

The Conference will open with a welcome to Iowa reception at the Science Education Center on Sunday evening, June 21. Although persons can attend for less than the entire conference, much of the continuity and purpose of the five days is lost for those unable to participate fully.

The Conference fee is \$100. Additional costs will include room and board - available in dormitories, a University hotel, or local camping areas.

For application materials, please write to the Conference Director, Bob Yager. Inquiries should be directed as follows:

Robert E. Yager
ISTS/NSSA Curriculum Update Conference
Science Education Center
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, IA 52242

Quick Crystals

When teaching about minerals, there is no way that you can omit the topic of crystals. Usually, we either go to our mineral cases and take out examples of crystals to pass around, or we grow our own. The only problem with these methods is that both take time. With the former, we are looking at crystals "after the fact." With the latter, we lost the interest of some students because it takes too long to grow crystals from a solution.

By putting thymol (an organic compound that is available from any pharmacist) in a Petri dish, you can grow and melt crystals several times in a short period. Thymol melts at 52°C, so that a hot water bath or a hot plate can be used to melt the compound. Once the thymol is in a liquid state, place the Petri dish on a desk top. Within five minutes or less small crystals will form. Soon after, the melt will solidify into a crystal-line mass. By adjusting the temperature, you can affect crystal size, distribution and surface of cooling, and can demonstrate crystal classification.

Cleanup is quick, too. Cover a Petri dish containing the crystals and store it for the next use. Because of the odor from the thymol, the room should be well aerated.

Sil Crespo
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