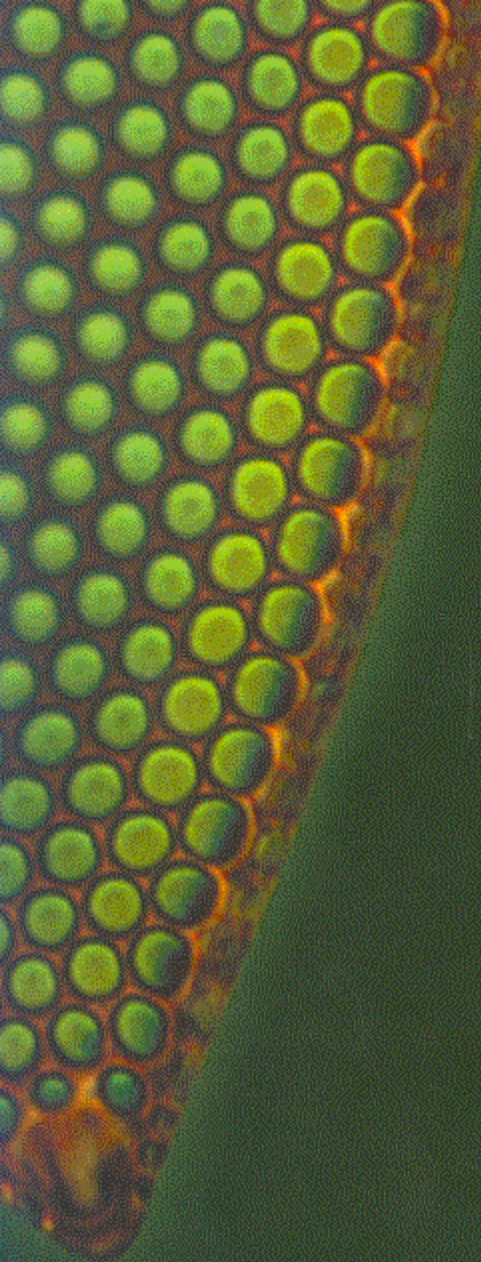




On the cover: *Triceratium latus* (trī-ser'ă-tē-um la'tus), a diatom

This electron micrograph shows the intricate pattern of holes in the glass cell wall of a diatom, which is a type of alga. Diatoms are an important food source for aquatic animals, but they also have a significant impact on human life. A quarter of the oxygen in the atmosphere and much of the petroleum we use in oil are produced by diatoms during photosynthesis. Fossilized diatoms, called diatomaceous earth, are used in water filters, kitty litter, and reflective highway paint. Manufacturers are currently looking toward using the cell walls of diatoms to make iridescent cosmetics, credit card holograms, and nanorobots. It might be possible to use diatom shells as delivery vehicles for drugs into the human body.

Microbes are everywhere and have a profound impact on our world. They sometimes cause disease, but they also have tremendously beneficial effects. Microbes help make food, energy, and consumer products that improve our quality of life—and even make life possible.

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