

determine microstructures. The patterns that appear, called X-ray diffraction patterns, can be analyzed to reveal the arrangement of atoms, molecules, or other particles that make up the material. By learning about microstructures, chemists can explain the behavior of macrostructures—the visible things all around you.

Branches of Chemistry

Chemistry includes many different branches of study and research. The following are six main areas, or branches, of study. But like the biological and physical sciences, these branches often overlap.

1. *Organic chemistry*—the study of most carbon-containing compounds
2. *Inorganic chemistry*—the study of non-organic substances, many of which have organic fragments bonded to metals (organometallics)
3. *Physical chemistry*—the study of the properties and changes of matter and their relation to energy
4. *Analytical chemistry*—the identification of the components and composition of materials
5. *Biochemistry*—the study of substances and processes occurring in living things
6. *Theoretical chemistry*—the use of mathematics and computers to understand the principles behind observed chemical behavior and to design and predict the properties of new compounds

In all areas of chemistry, scientists work with chemicals. A **chemical** *is any substance that has a definite composition*. For example, consider the material called sucrose, or cane sugar. It has a definite composition in terms of the atoms that compose it. It is produced by certain plants in the chemical process of photosynthesis. Sucrose is a chemical. Carbon dioxide, water, and countless other substances are chemicals as well.

Knowing the properties of chemicals allows chemists to find suitable uses for them. For example, researchers have synthesized new substances, such as artificial sweeteners and synthetic fibers. The reactions used to make these chemicals can often be carried out on a large scale to make new consumer products such as flavor enhancers and fabrics.

Basic Research

Basic research is carried out for the sake of increasing knowledge, such as how and why a specific reaction occurs and what the properties of a substance are. Chance discoveries can be the result of basic research. The properties of Teflon™, for example, were first discovered by accident. A researcher named Roy Plunkett was puzzled by the fact that a gas cylinder used for an experiment appeared to be empty even though the measured mass of the cylinder clearly indicated there was something inside. Plunkett cut the cylinder open and found a white solid. Through basic research, Plunkett's research team determined the nonstick properties, molecular structure, and chemical composition of the new material.