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Gene found that produces unfertilized seeds

Researchers have found a gene that allows the ova of plants to grow into seeds without fertilization. This could make it possible in the future for seeds to be produced that are genetically identical to the parent plant for various crops.

Some plants, such as the dandelion and hawkweed, occasionally produce seeds without fertilization. The plants that grow from those seeds all have the same properties as the parent plant. Researchers from the Wageningen company KeyGene and the Biosystematics chair group, working with colleagues from Japan and New Zealand, discovered the PAR gene, which deceives the egg cells in the ovary, making them divide without being fertilized.

The researchers say that this discovery, which was published in *Nature Genetics* in January, will make it possible to speed up plant breeding and will reduce the cost of seed production. For example, it may be possible in future to make a direct copy of the desirable traits of parent plants in the seed. KeyGene and the Japanese plant breeding company Takii have already managed to switch on PAR genes in lettuce and sunflowers.

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