



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

Object 19: Pea plant



What is it?

Pisum sativum is the botanical name for the pea plant. Austrian monk Gregor Mendel used pea plants in experiments that resulted in the discovery of heredity, which forms the basis of modern genetics.

History

Mendel was a monk, teacher and scientist and carried out experiments in the garden of the monastery where he lived. In the mid nineteenth century he grew almost 30,000 pea plants and was the first person to record how characteristics are inherited. Mendel's work was controversial and not widely accepted until after his death.

Pathology

Mendel coined the term 'dominant' to describe a trait that was expressed in the offspring of two plants, and 'recessive' to describe a trait that is masked when a dominant gene is present. He was the first person to describe the concept of 'genes'. All of these terms are now in widespread use and help geneticists to investigate and explain the way in which certain conditions are inherited.

Find out more

Learn more about genetics with the [Dummies 'how to' guide](#).