Teaching medicinal plants to make new drugs.

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MIT researchers have shown that medicinal plants can be made to make new, novel drugs. The scientists introduced bacterial genes into a plant that naturally produces the a chemical (vinblastine) that is used to treat some forms of cancer. The new genes gave the plants the ability to produce modified versions of vinblastine. The study showed that plants, even though they are very complex, may be manipulated in ways that allow them to produce new, possiblty better, drugs. The plant used for the work is a common garden flower in many parts of the U.S., catharanthus rosea or 'vinca'.

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