Scientists have discovered new plant language

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NEW RESEARCH HAS found that plants are communicating much more than was previously thought.

Carried out by Jim Westwood, a professor of plant pathology, physiology, and weed science at Virginia Tech in the United States, the study found high levels of information being transferred on a molecular level between plants. Westwood carried out the experiment by looking at the relationship between a parasitic plant and two host plants, one of which was a tomato. The plants use tiny RNA molecules to transmit genetic messages between themselves.

These RNA messages contain information on actions for other plants to take, such as which proteins to code. It is thought that thousands of these molecules are passed between the plants.

On the finding, Westwood said:

“Now that we have found that they are sharing all this information, the next question is, ‘What exactly are they telling each other?’”

The research will hopefully gives new insight to researchers looking into damaging affect that parasitic weeds can have on food crops.

With these communications, parasitic plants may be instructing healthy crops to lower their defences to allow them to attack. It is thought that the new information could be used to investigate if similar communications occur between bacteria and fungi.
It is hoped that Westwood's findings could open up an area of research and help with problems of international food scarcity. On the development, Professor Julie Scholes from the University of Sheffield said

Parasitic plants such as witchweed and broomrape are serious problems for legumes and other crops that help feed some of the poorest regions in Africa and elsewhere. So overall, this seems like a positive development. All the same, it's hard not to find the idea of plants talking a little unsettling.