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Isn't it Good? Scientists Sequence Norwegian Wood

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Beatles' fans, Santa-lovers and plant nerds take heart: The first gymnosperm genome, the common Christmas tree (i.e. "Norwegian wood"), has been sequenced.

The coniferous Norway spruce (*Picea abies*) is one of the most widespread and important plants in Europe. The gymnosperms belong to a group of seed-producing plants that includes conifers, cycads, Ginkoplants and woody plants called gnetophytes.

Conifers have some of the

biggest genomes (most DNA) of all organisms, making them rather tough to study. The Norway spruce genome contains 20 billion genetic letter-pairs, but has roughly the same number of genes (stretches of DNA that code for a specific protein) as the widely studied plant *Arabidopsis*, whose genome is 100 times smaller. Studying the spruce's genome could provide new tools for conifer breeding. The findings were detailed today (May 22) in the journal *Nature*.

The Norway spruce is the first gymnosperm to have its genome sequenced.

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