Gregor Mendel.

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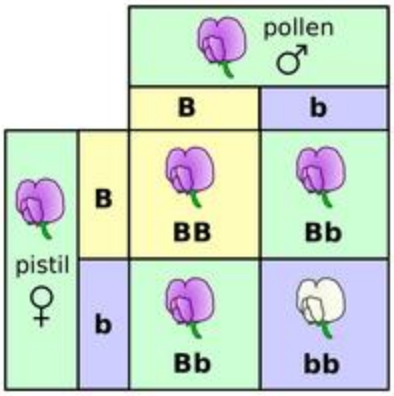
- **Born:** July 22, 1822
- **Birthplace:** Heinzendorf, Austria (now Hyncice, Czech Republic)
- **Died:** January 6, 1884
- **Place of death:** Brünn, Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Brno, Czech Republic)

Gregor Mendel was a scientist from Austria. He is famous for his work in **genetics** . Genetics explains how **trait** s, or features like eye color, are passed from parent to child. Mendel was the first person to explain how **genes** work.

Gregor Mendel. Unknown author / Public domain



A Punnett square demonstrating Mendel's Laws of Inheritance with dominant and recessive traits. Madprime / CC0

Early Life

Gregor Mendel's family lived in Austria. They were very poor. In 1822, when Mendel was born, families had to pay to send their children to school. Poor children went to school for only a few years. Then the children went to work.

Mendel was a very good student. Soon he joined a **monastery** . A monastery is a home for **monks** , religious men who pray and do good works. The monks in Mendel's monastery loved to learn.

Traits

Parents and children often have the same traits. Having brown eyes is a trait. Being short is also a trait. Animals and plants have traits, too. Like people, animals and plants can share traits with their **offspring,** or babies.

In the 1840s, scientists knew that living things passed some of their traits to their offspring, but they did not know how this worked. Mendel is often called the "father of genetics" for his study of traits in pea plants.

Pea Plants

In 1856, Mendel experimented on some pea plants. Each of the plants had different traits. Some had rough seeds, while others had smooth seeds.

Mendel **mixed types or breeds** , of plants and he grew new plants. He wrote down the traits of these new plants. Then he mixed or bred the new plants with each other. He did this for two years.

Discoveries

Mendel found that every plant had two **genes** . The genes **cause** , or make, a plant's traits. For example, genes tell if a plant's seeds are rough or smooth. Genes cause the kind of flowers a plant has. Every plant offspring gets one gene from each parent.

Mendel also learned that some genes are **dominant** and some are **recessive.** *Dominant* means strong. *Recessive* means weak. A plant with one dominant gene and one recessive gene will have the dominant trait. But the plant may pass its recessive gene to its offspring.

A New Science

Today, Mendel's ideas are called **genetics.** Genetics is the study of how traits are passed down. Mendel continued to study science until his death in 1884.

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Stephen Currie has extensive experience in writing for middle and high school readers. He has published books on topics ranging from invasive species to child labor, and from the Mississippi River to the construction of Steinway pianos. He has also written curriculum materials for secondary-level subjects, including math, history, science, and personal finance. He has taught classes and given workshops for students of all ages from kindergarten through college.

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