ON THE COVER

Diversification of MADS box genes has been proposed as a major driving force for floral diversity in land plants. Yamaguchi et al. (pages 15–28) investigate the functions of rice OSMADS3 and OSMADS58, homologs of Arabidopsis AGAMOUS, a C-class MADS box gene that regulates stamen and carpel identity and floral meristem determinacy. The authors show that disruption of OSMADS3 in a T-DNA insertion line results in homeotic transformation of stamens into lodicules and the ectopic development of lodicules in the second whorl. By contrast, RNA-silenced lines of OSMADS58 developed flowers that reiterate lodicules, stamens, and carpel-like organs, suggesting loss of determinacy in the floral meristem. The results suggest that functions regulated by AGAMOUS in Arabidopsis have been partially sub-functionalized during the evolution of rice into two paralogous genes, OSMADS3 and OSMADS58, which arose from a recent gene duplication event. In addition, the development of ectopic lodicules in OSMADS3 loss-of-function mutants points to a role for C-class genes in the asymmetric distribution of lodicules in the rice flower.

IN THIS ISSUE

Identification of Rust Fungi Avirulence Elicitors
Nancy A. Eckardt 1

CURRENT PERSPECTIVE ESSAY

The Structure of Phytochrome: A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Spectra
Nathan C. Rockwell and J. Clark Lagarias 4

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Functional Diversification of the Two C-Class MADS Box Genes OSMADS3 and OSMADS58 in Oryza sativa
Takahiro Yamaguchi, Dong Yeon Lee, Akio Miyao, Hikohiko Hirochika, Gynheung An, and Hiro-Yuki Hirano 15

A New Role for the Arabidopsis AP2 Transcription Factor, LEAFY PETIOLE, in Gibberellin-Induced Germination Is Revealed by the Misexpression of a Homologous Gene, SOB2/DRN-LIKE
Jason M. Ward, Alison M. Smith, Purvi K. Shah, Sarah E. Galanti, Hankul Yi, Agnes J. Demianski, Eric van der Graaff, Beat Keller, and Michael M. Neff 29

Arabidopsis Cytokinin Receptor Mutants Reveal Functions in Shoot Growth, Leaf Senescence, Seed Size, Germination, Root Development, and Cytokinin Metabolism
Michael Riefler, Ondrej Novak, Miroslav Strnad, and Thomas Schmülling 40

Arabidopsis Response Regulators ARR3 and ARR4 Play Cytokinin-Independent Roles in the Control of Circadian Period
Patrice A. Salomé, Jennifer P.C. To, Joseph J. Kieber, and C. Robertson McClung 55

Arabidopsis CONSTANS-LIKE3 Is a Positive Regulator of Red Light Signaling and Root Growth
Sourav Datta, G.H.C.M. Het tilliarachchi, Xing-Wang Deng, and Magnus Holm 70

ROR1/RPA2A, a Putative Replication Protein A2, Functions in Epigenetic Gene Silencing and in Regulation of Meristem Development in Arabidopsis
Ran Xia, J uncguo Wang, Chunyan Liu, Yu Wang, Youqun Wang, Jixian Zhai, Jun Liu, Xuhui Hong, Xiaofeng Cao, Jian-Kang Zhu, and Zhizhong Gong 85

The Temperature-Dependent Change in Methylation of the Antirrhinum Transposon Tam3 Is Controlled by the Activity of Its Transposase
Shin-Nosuke Hashida, Takako Uchiyama, Cathie Martin, Yuji Kishima, Yoshio Sano, and Tetsuo Mikami 104
Ordered Histone Modifications Are Associated with Transcriptional Posing and Activation of the phaseolin Promoter
Danny W-K. Ng, Mahesh B. Chandrasekharan, and Timothy C. Hall

Different Domains Control the Localization and Mobility of LIKE HETEROCHROMATIN PROTEIN1 in Arabidopsis Nuclei
Assaf Zernach, Yan Li, Hagit Ben-Meir, Moran Oliva, Assaf Mosquina, Vladimir Kiss, Yigal Avivi, Nir Ohad, and Gideon Grafi

The Serine/Arginine-Rich Protein Family in Rice Plays Important Roles in Constitutive and Alternative Splicing of Pre-mRNA
Masayuki Isshiki, Ayako Tsumoto, and Ko Shimamoto

Chloroplast Biogenesis of Photosystem II Cores Involves a Series of Assembly-Controlled Steps That Regulate Translation
Limor Minal, Katia Wostrikoff, Francis-André Wollman, and Yves Choquet

pTAC2, -6, and -12 Are Components of the Transcriptionally Active Plastid Chromosome That Are Required for Plastid Gene Expression
Jeanette Pfalz, Karsten Liere, Andrea Kandlbinder, Karl-Josef Dietz, and Ralf Oelmüller

Golgi-Mediated Vacular Sorting of the Endoplasmic Reticulum Chaperone BIP May Play an Active Role in Quality Control within the Secretory Pathway
Peter Pimpl, J. Philip Taylor, Christopher Snowden, Stefan Hillmer, David G. Robinson, and Jurgen Denecke

The Arabidopsis vitamin E pathway gene5-1 Mutant Reveals a Critical Role for Phytol Kinase in Seed Tocopherol Biosynthesis
Henry E. Valentin, Kim Lincoln, Farhad Moshiri, Pamela K. Jensen, Qungang Qi, Tyamagondlu V. Venkatesh, Balasulojini Karunananda, Susan R. Baszis, Susan R. Norris, Beth Savidge, Kenneth J. Gruys, and Robert L. Last

Polar Localizing Class V Myosin Chitin Synthases Are Essential during Early Plant Infection in the Plant Pathogenic Fungus Ustilago maydis
Isabella Weber, Daniela Abmann, Eckhard Thines, and Gero Steinberg

Haustorally Expressed Secreted Proteins from Flax Rust Are Highly Enriched for Avirulence Elicitors
Ann-Marie Catanzariti, Peter N. Dodds, Gregory J. Lawrence, Michael A. Ayliffe, and Jeffrey G. Ellis

The Membrane-Anchor Botrytis-Induced Kinase1 Plays Distinct Roles in Arabidopsis Resistance to Necrotrophic and Biotrophic Pathogens
Paola Veronese, Hirofumi Nakagami, Burton Blhm, Syan AbuQamar, Xi Chen, John Salmeron, Robert A. Dietrich, Herbert Hirt, and Testaye Mengiste

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