

Tires Made from Dandelions Replace Rubber

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It isn't just fossil fuels that are a finite resource—rubber is another substance in high demand, and short supply.

The latest estimates suggest that global demand for rubber is expected to outstrip supply by 20 percent, by 2020.

That will inevitably lead to raised prices—bad news, considering just how many items made of rubber we used day-to-day. Tires, being a significant one.

Dutch scientists and a common garden weed may be along to help, according to CNN. The scientists work at biotech firm KeyGene, and the weed is the humble dandelion, whose roots contain latex—a natural rubber.

Dandelion roots aren't really sufficient for the quantities of rubber required to meet global demand, so KeyGene is putting it through a process of 'plant phenotyping'. Using DNA profiling of types that exhibit favorable characteristics, the team is crossing different breeds of dandelion to grow a breed with a fatter root. This larger root is better suited to the quantities of latex required.

Tire company Apollo Vredestein is collaborating on the project, and says prototype tires have already been produced.

If continuing trials are successful and large enough quantities of the plant are grown, the tires could be ready for full-scale production in as little as five to ten years—just in time to meet demand.

KeyGene's techniques could also result in improvements in crop [yields](#). While there is resistance to genetic modification, the company says its technique is more "genetic improvement"—speeding up the evolution process to develop crops with a higher yield and resistance to pests.

That could prove invaluable for another green issue--biofuels--as world population grows and the food versus fuel debate intensifies.
