

Sapling thrives from 2,000-year-old seed

November 24 2005

Israeli scientists say a sapling germinated earlier this year from a 2,000-year-old date palm seed is thriving.

"It's 80 centimeters (three feet) high with nine leaves, and it looks great," Sarah Sallon, director of the Hadassah Medical Organization's Louis L. Borick Natural Medicine Research Center in Jerusalem, told National Geographic News.

Sallon's program is dedicated to the study of complementary and alternative medicines. The center is also interested in conserving the heritage of Middle Eastern plants that have been used medicinally for thousands of years.

Sallon says she wants to see if the ancient tree -- nicknamed Methuselah -- produces any unique medicinal properties no longer found in modern date palm varieties.

"Dates were famous in antiquity for medicinal value," she told NGN, noting they were used for various diseases.

She and her colleagues are currently comparing the structure of the sapling to modern date palms and examining DNA from one of the sapling's leaves.

The team plans to publish their results early next year.

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Citation: Sapling thrives from 2,000-year-old seed (2005, November 24) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2005-11-sapling-year-old-seed.html>

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