

# CHAPTER 32

## Plant Reproduction



**Figure 32.1** Plants that reproduce sexually often achieve fertilization with the help of pollinators such as (a) bees, (b) birds, and (c) butterflies. (credit a: modification of work by John Severns; credit b: modification of work by Charles J. Sharp; credit c: modification of work by "Galawebdesign"/Flickr)

**INTRODUCTION** Plants have evolved different reproductive strategies for the continuation of their species. Some plants reproduce sexually, and others asexually, in contrast to animal species, which rely almost exclusively on sexual reproduction. Plant sexual reproduction usually depends on pollinating agents, while asexual reproduction is independent of these agents. Flowers are often the showiest or most strongly scented part of plants. With their bright colors, fragrances, and interesting shapes and sizes, flowers attract insects, birds, and animals to serve their pollination needs. Other plants pollinate via wind or water; still others self-pollinate.

### Chapter Outline

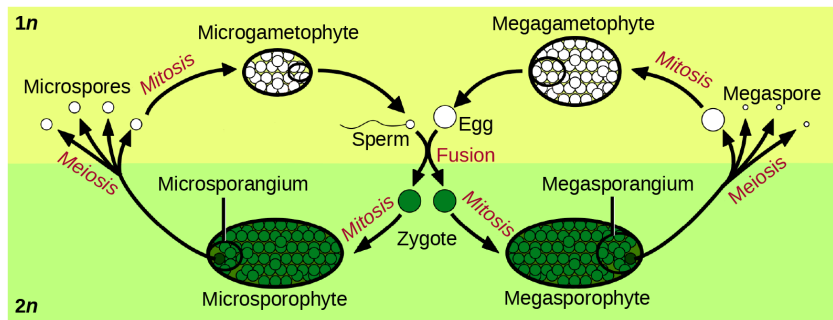
- 32.1 Reproductive Development and Structure
- 32.2 Pollination and Fertilization
- 32.3 Asexual Reproduction

## 32.1 Reproductive Development and Structure

*By the end of this section, you will be able to do the following:*

- Describe the two stages of a plant's lifecycle
- Compare and contrast male and female gametophytes and explain how they form in angiosperms
- Describe the reproductive structures of a plant
- Describe the components of a complete flower
- Describe the development of microsporangium and megasporangium in gymnosperms

Sexual reproduction takes place with slight variations in different groups of plants. Plants have two distinct stages in their lifecycle: the gametophyte stage and the sporophyte stage. The haploid **gametophyte** produces the male and female gametes by mitosis in distinct multicellular structures. Fusion of the male and female gametes forms the diploid zygote, which develops into the **sporophyte**. After reaching maturity, the diploid sporophyte produces spores by meiosis, which in turn divide by mitosis to produce the haploid gametophyte. The new gametophyte produces gametes, and the cycle continues. This is the alternation of generations, and is typical of plant reproduction ([Figure 32.2](#)).



**Figure 32.2** The alternation of generations in angiosperms is depicted in this diagram. (credit: modification of work by Peter Coxhead)

The life cycle of higher plants is dominated by the sporophyte stage, with the gametophyte borne on the sporophyte. In ferns, the gametophyte is free-living and very distinct in structure from the diploid sporophyte. In bryophytes, such as mosses, the haploid gametophyte is more developed than the sporophyte.

During the vegetative phase of growth, plants increase in size and produce a shoot system and a root system. As they enter the reproductive phase, some of the branches start to bear flowers. Many flowers are borne singly, whereas some are borne in clusters. The flower is borne on a stalk known as a receptacle. Flower shape, color, and size are unique to each species, and are often used by taxonomists to classify plants.

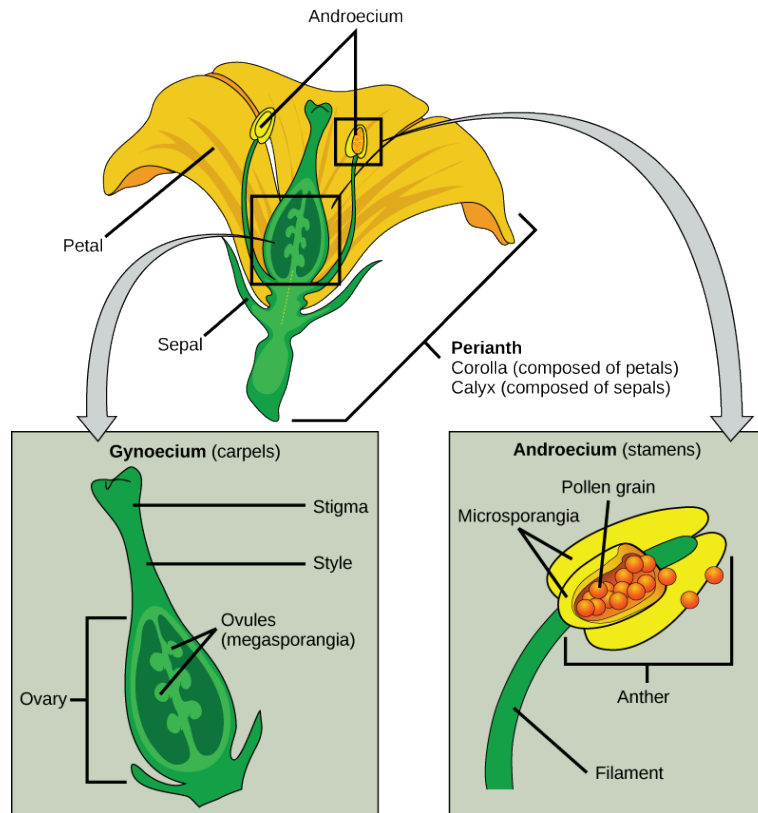
## Sexual Reproduction in Angiosperms

The lifecycle of angiosperms follows the alternation of generations explained previously. The haploid gametophyte alternates with the diploid sporophyte during the sexual reproduction process of angiosperms. Flowers contain the plant's reproductive structures.

### Flower Structure

A typical flower has four main parts—or whorls—known as the calyx, corolla, androecium, and gynoecium (Figure 32.3). The outermost whorl of the flower has green, leafy structures known as sepals. The sepals, collectively called the calyx, help to protect the unopened bud. The second whorl is comprised of petals—usually, brightly colored—collectively called the corolla. The number of sepals and petals varies depending on whether the plant is a monocot or dicot. In monocots, petals usually number three or multiples of three; in dicots, the number of petals is four or five, or multiples of four and five. Together, the calyx and corolla are known as the **perianth**. The third whorl contains the male reproductive structures and is known as the androecium. The **androecium** has stamens with anthers that contain the microsporangia. The innermost group of structures in the flower is the **gynoecium**, or the female reproductive component(s). The carpel is the individual unit of the gynoecium and has a stigma, style, and ovary. A flower may have one or multiple carpels.

## VISUAL CONNECTION



**Figure 32.3** The four main parts of the flower are the calyx, corolla, androecium, and gynoecium. The androecium is the sum of all the male reproductive organs, and the gynoecium is the sum of the female reproductive organs. (credit: modification of work by Mariana Ruiz Villareal)

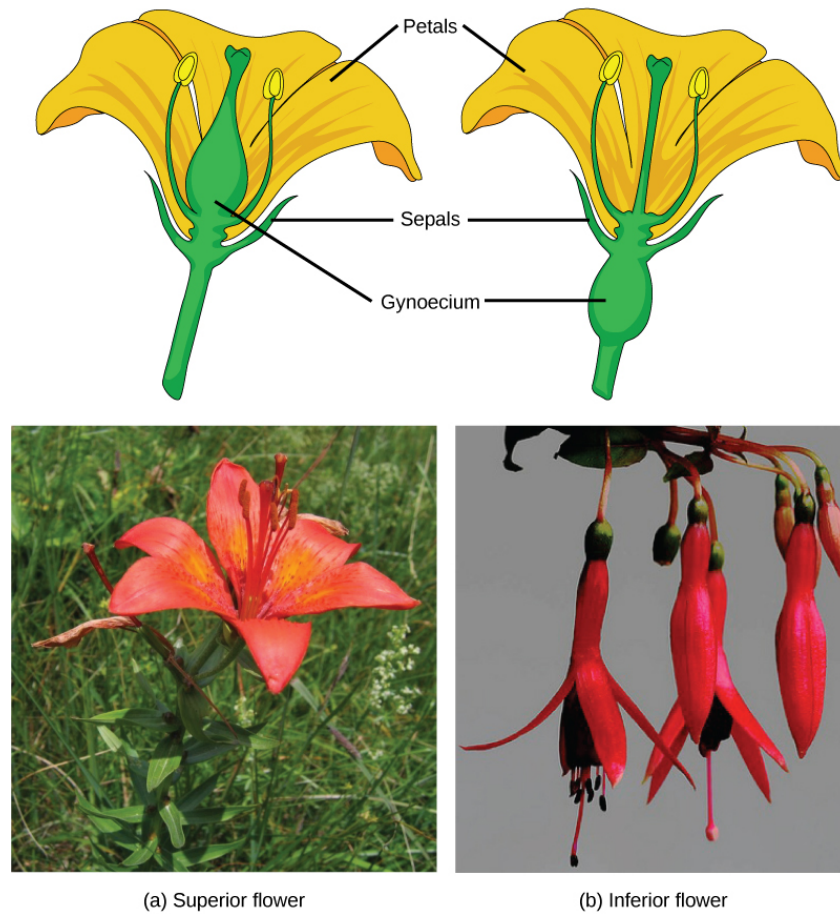
If the anther is missing, what type of reproductive structure will the flower be unable to produce? What term is used to describe an incomplete flower lacking the androecium? What term describes an incomplete flower lacking a gynoecium?

If all four whorls (the calyx, corolla, androecium, and gynoecium) are present, the flower is described as complete. If any of the four parts is missing, the flower is known as incomplete. Flowers that contain both an androecium and a gynoecium are called perfect, androgynous or hermaphrodites. There are two types of incomplete flowers: staminate flowers contain only an androecium, and carpellate flowers have only a gynoecium ([Figure 32.4](#)).



**Figure 32.4** The corn plant has both staminate (male) and carpellate (female) flowers. Staminate flowers, which are clustered in the tassel at the tip of the stem, produce pollen grains. Carpellate flowers are clustered in the immature ears. Each strand of silk is a stigma. The corn kernels are seeds that develop on the ear after fertilization. Also shown is the lower stem and root.

If both male and female flowers are borne on the same plant, the species is called monoecious (meaning “one home”): examples are corn and pea. Species with male and female flowers borne on separate plants are termed dioecious, or “two homes,” examples of which are *C. papaya* and *Cannabis*. The ovary, which may contain one or multiple ovules, may be placed above other flower parts, which is referred to as superior; or, it may be placed below the other flower parts, referred to as inferior ([Figure 32.5](#)).

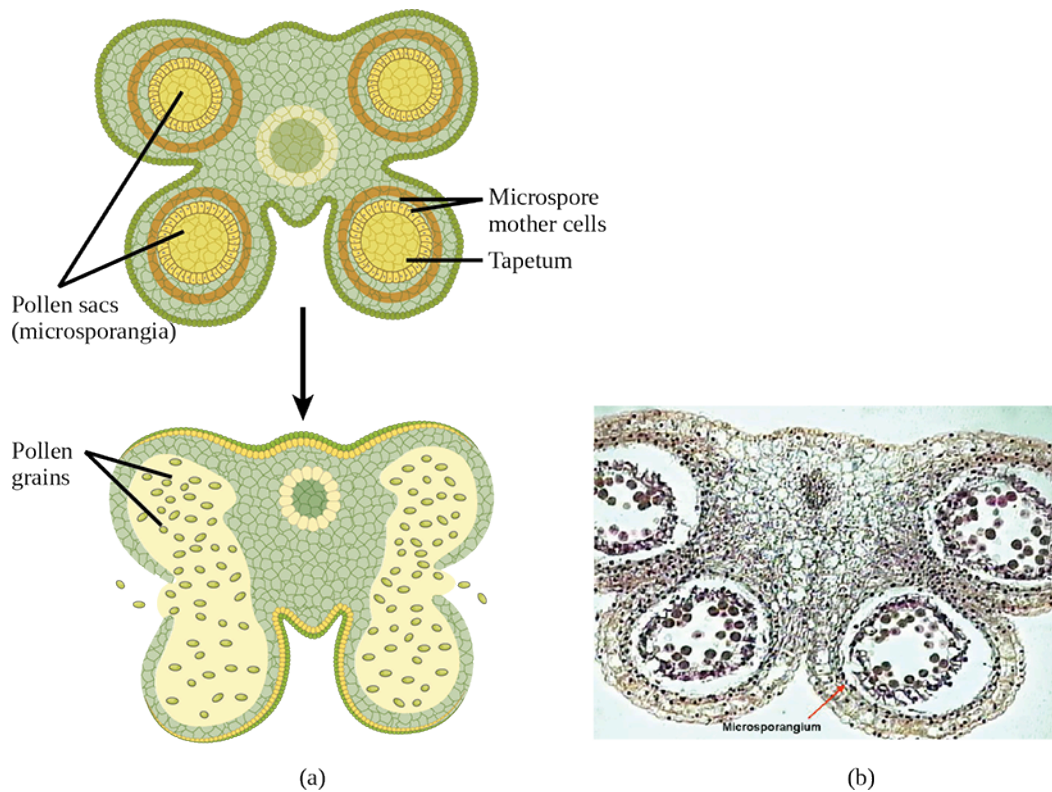


**Figure 32.5** The (a) lily is a superior flower, which has the ovary above the other flower parts. (b) Fuchsia is an inferior flower, which has the ovary beneath other flower parts. (credit a photo: modification of work by Benjamin Zwiitnig; credit b photo: modification of work by "Koshy Koshy"/Flickr)

### Male Gametophyte (The Pollen Grain)

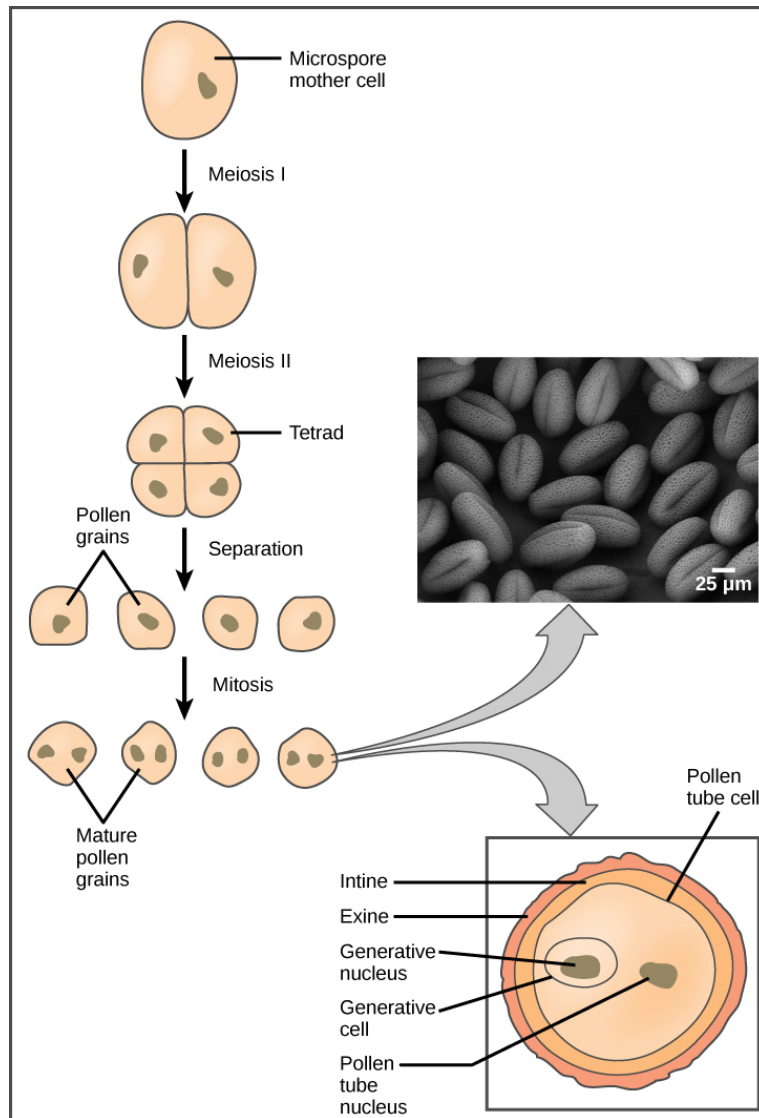
The male gametophyte develops and reaches maturity in an immature anther. In a plant's male reproductive organs, development of pollen takes place in a structure known as the **microsporangium** (Figure 32.6). The microsporangia, which are usually bilobed, are pollen sacs in which the microspores develop into pollen grains. These are found in the anther, which is at the end of the stamen—the long filament that supports the anther.





**Figure 32.6** Shown is (a) a cross section of an anther at two developmental stages. The immature anther (top) contains four microsporangia, or pollen sacs. Each microsporangium contains hundreds of microspore mother cells that will each give rise to four pollen grains. The tapetum supports the development and maturation of the pollen grains. Upon maturation of the pollen (bottom), the pollen sac walls split open and the pollen grains (male gametophytes) are released, as shown in the (b) micrograph of an immature lily anther. In these scanning electron micrographs, pollen sacs are ready to burst, releasing their grains. (credit a: modification of work by LibreTexts; b: modification of work by Robert R. Wise; scale-bar data from Matt Russell)

Within the microsporangium, each of the microspore mother cells divides by meiosis to give rise to four microspores, each of which will ultimately form a pollen grain (Figure 32.7). An inner layer of cells, known as the tapetum, provides nutrition to the developing microspores and contributes key components to the pollen wall. Mature pollen grains contain two cells: a generative cell and a pollen tube cell. The generative cell is contained within the larger pollen tube cell. Upon germination, the tube cell forms the pollen tube through which the generative cell migrates to enter the ovary. During its transit inside the pollen tube, the generative cell divides to form two male gametes (sperm cells). Upon maturity, the microsporangia burst, releasing the pollen grains from the anther.



**Figure 32.7** Pollen develops from the microspore mother cells. The mature pollen grain is composed of two cells: the pollen tube cell and the generative cell, which is inside the tube cell. The pollen grain has two coverings: an inner layer (intine) and an outer layer (exine). The inset scanning electron micrograph shows *Arabidopsis lyrata* pollen grains. (credit “pollen micrograph”: modification of work by Robert R. Wise; scale-bar data from Matt Russell)

Each pollen grain has two coverings: the **exine** (thicker, outer layer) and the **intine** (Figure 32.7). The exine contains sporopollenin, a complex waterproofing substance supplied by the tapetal cells. Sporopollenin allows the pollen to survive under unfavorable conditions and to be carried by wind, water, or biological agents without undergoing damage.

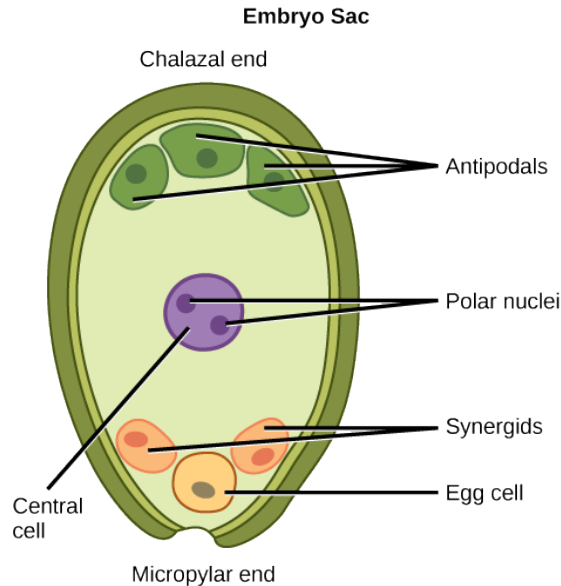
### Female Gametophyte (The Embryo Sac)

While the details may vary between species, the overall development of the female gametophyte has two distinct phases. First, in the process of **megasporogenesis**, a single cell in the diploid **megasporeangium**—an area of tissue in the ovules—undergoes meiosis to produce four megaspores, only one of which survives. During the second phase, **megagametogenesis**, the surviving haploid megaspore undergoes mitosis to produce an eight-nucleate, seven-cell female gametophyte, also known as the megagametophyte or embryo sac. Two of the nuclei—the **polar nuclei**—move to the equator and fuse, forming a single, diploid central cell. This central cell later fuses with a sperm to form the triploid endosperm. Three nuclei position themselves on the end of the embryo sac opposite the micropyle and develop into the **antipodal** cells, which later degenerate. The nucleus closest to the micropyle becomes the female gamete, or egg cell, and the two adjacent nuclei develop into **synergid** cells (Figure 32.8). The synergids help guide the pollen tube for successful fertilization, after which they disintegrate. Once fertilization is complete, the resulting diploid zygote develops into the embryo, and the fertilized ovule forms the other tissues of the seed.

A double-layered integument protects the megasporangium and, later, the embryo sac. The integument will develop into the seed coat after fertilization and protect the entire seed. The ovule wall will become part of the fruit. The integuments, while protecting the megasporangium, do not enclose it completely, but leave an opening called the **micropyle**. The micropyle allows the pollen tube to enter the female gametophyte for fertilization.



## VISUAL CONNECTION



**Figure 32.8** As shown in this diagram of the embryo sac in angiosperms, the ovule is covered by integuments and has an opening called a micropyle. Inside the embryo sac are three antipodal cells, two synergids, a central cell, and the egg cell.

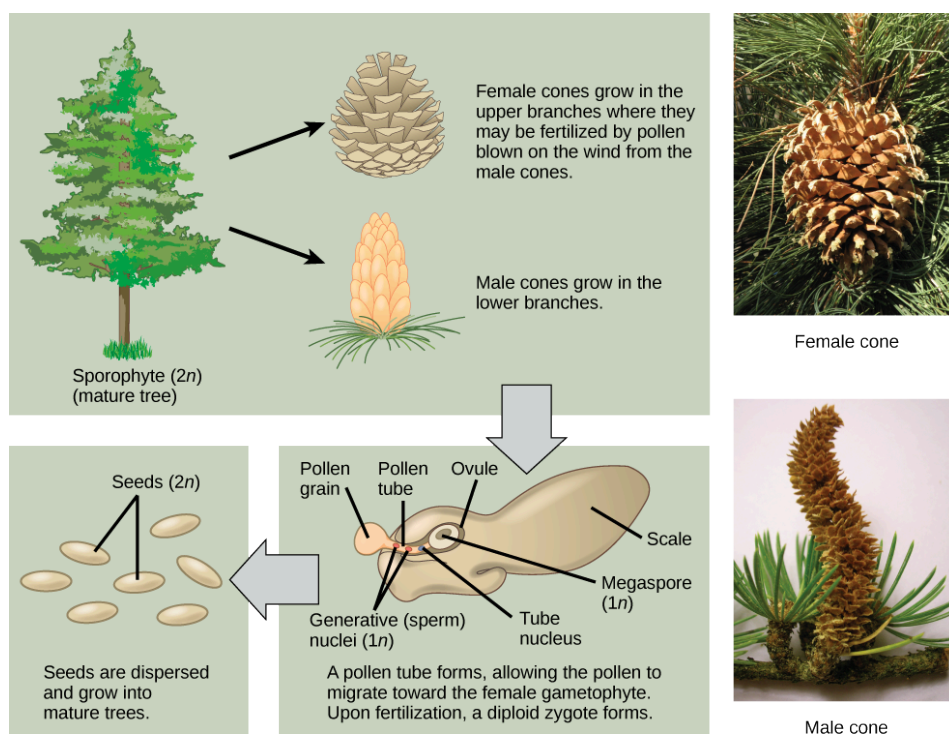
An embryo sac is missing the synergids. What specific impact would you expect this to have on fertilization?

- The pollen tube will be unable to form.
- The pollen tube will form but will not be guided toward the egg.
- Fertilization will not occur because the synergid is the egg.
- Fertilization will occur but the embryo will not be able to grow.

## Sexual Reproduction in Gymnosperms

As with angiosperms, the lifecycle of a gymnosperm is also characterized by alternation of generations. In conifers such as pines, the green leafy part of the plant is the sporophyte, and the cones contain the male and female gametophytes ([Figure 32.9](#)). The female cones are larger than the male cones and are positioned towards the top of the tree; the small, male cones are located in the lower region of the tree. Because the pollen is shed and blown by the wind, this arrangement makes it difficult for a gymnosperm to self-pollinate.





**Figure 32.9** This image shows the lifecycle of a conifer. Pollen from male cones blows up into upper branches, where it fertilizes female cones. Examples are shown of female and male cones. (credit “female”: modification of work by “Geographer”/Wikimedia Commons; credit “male”: modification of work by Roger Griffith)

### Male Gametophyte

A male cone has a central axis on which bracts, a type of modified leaf, are attached. The bracts are known as **microsporophylls** (Figure 32.10) and are the sites where microspores will develop. The microspores develop inside the microsporangium. Within the microsporangium, cells known as microsporocytes divide by meiosis to produce four haploid microspores. Further mitosis of the microspore produces two nuclei: the generative nucleus, and the tube nucleus. Upon maturity, the male gametophyte (pollen) is released from the male cones and is carried by the wind to land on the female cone.

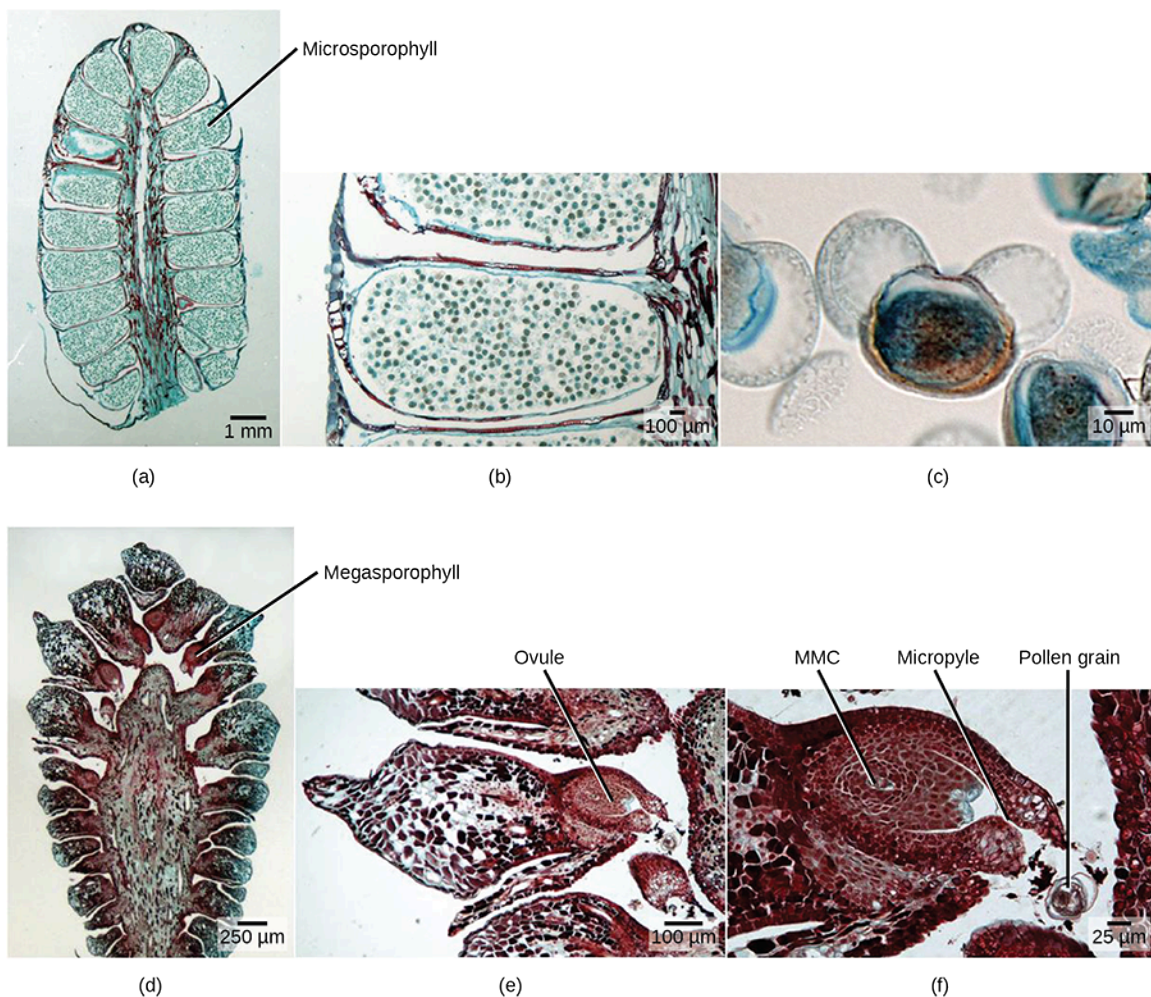
### LINK TO LEARNING

Watch this video to see a cedar releasing its pollen in the wind.

[Click to view content \(https://www.openstax.org/l/pollen\\_release\)](https://www.openstax.org/l/pollen_release)

### Female Gametophyte

The female cone also has a central axis on which bracts known as **megasporophylls** (Figure 32.10) are present. In the female cone, megaspore mother cells are present in the megasporangium. The megaspore mother cell divides by meiosis to produce four haploid megaspores. One of the megaspores divides to form the multicellular female gametophyte, while the others divide to form the rest of the structure. The female gametophyte is contained within a structure called the archegonium.



**Figure 32.10** This series of micrographs shows male and female gymnosperm gametophytes. (a) This male cone, shown in cross section, has approximately 20 microsporophylls, each of which produces hundreds of male gametophytes (pollen grains). (b) Pollen grains are visible in this single microsporophyll. (c) This micrograph shows an individual pollen grain. (d) This cross section of a female cone shows portions of about 15 megasporophylls. (e) The ovule can be seen in this single megasporophyll. (f) Within this single ovule are the megaspore mother cell (MMC), micropyle, and a pollen grain. (credit: modification of work by Robert R. Wise; scale-bar data from Matt Russell)

### Reproductive Process

Upon landing on the female cone, the tube cell of the pollen forms the pollen tube, through which the generative cell migrates towards the female gametophyte through the micropyle. It takes approximately one year for the pollen tube to grow and migrate towards the female gametophyte. The male gametophyte containing the generative cell splits into two sperm nuclei, one of which fuses with the egg, while the other degenerates. After fertilization of the egg, the diploid zygote is formed, which divides by mitosis to form the embryo. The scales of the cones are closed during development of the seed. The seed is covered by a seed coat, which is derived from the female sporophyte. Seed development takes another one to two years. Once the seed is ready to be dispersed, the bracts of the female cones open to allow the dispersal of seed; no fruit formation takes place because gymnosperm seeds have no covering.

### Angiosperms versus Gymnosperms

Gymnosperm reproduction differs from that of angiosperms in several ways ([Figure 32.11](#)). In angiosperms, the female gametophyte exists in an enclosed structure—the ovule—which is within the ovary; in gymnosperms, the female gametophyte is present on exposed bracts of the female cone. Double fertilization is a key event in the lifecycle of angiosperms, but is completely absent in gymnosperms. The male and female gametophyte structures are present on separate male and female cones in gymnosperms, whereas in angiosperms, they are a part of the flower. Lastly, wind plays an important role in pollination in

gymnosperms because pollen is blown by the wind to land on the female cones. Although many angiosperms are also wind-pollinated, animal pollination is more common.



**Figure 32.11** (a) Angiosperms are flowering plants, and include grasses, herbs, shrubs and most deciduous trees, while (b) gymnosperms are conifers. Both produce seeds but have different reproductive strategies. (credit a: modification of work by Wendy Cutler; credit b: modification of work by Lews Castle UHI)

### LINK TO LEARNING

View an animation of the double fertilization process of angiosperms.

[Click to view content \(https://www.openstax.org/l/angiosperms\)](https://www.openstax.org/l/angiosperms)

## 32.2 Pollination and Fertilization

*By the end of this section, you will be able to do the following:*

- Describe what must occur for plant fertilization
- Explain cross-pollination and the ways in which it takes place
- Describe the process that leads to the development of a seed
- Define double fertilization

In angiosperms, **pollination** is defined as the placement or transfer of pollen from the anther to the stigma of the same flower or another flower. In gymnosperms, pollination involves pollen transfer from the male cone to the female cone. Upon transfer, the pollen germinates to form the pollen tube and the sperm for fertilizing the egg. Pollination has been well studied since the time of Gregor Mendel. Mendel successfully carried out self- as well as cross-pollination in garden peas while studying how characteristics were passed on from one generation to the next. Today's crops are a result of plant breeding, which employs artificial selection to produce the present-day cultivars. A case in point is today's corn, which is a result of years of breeding that started with its ancestor, teosinte. The teosinte that the ancient Mayans originally began cultivating had tiny seeds—vastly different from today's relatively giant ears of corn. Interestingly, though these two plants appear to be entirely different, the genetic difference between them is miniscule.

Pollination takes two forms: self-pollination and cross-pollination. **Self-pollination** occurs when the pollen from the anther is deposited on the stigma of the same flower, or another flower on the same plant. **Cross-pollination** is the transfer of pollen from the anther of one flower to the stigma of another flower on a different individual of the same species. Self-pollination occurs in flowers where the stamen and carpel mature at the same time, and are positioned so that the pollen can land on the flower's stigma. This method of pollination does not require an investment from the plant to provide nectar and pollen as food for pollinators.

### LINK TO LEARNING

Explore this [interactive website \(http://openstax.org/l/pollination\)](http://openstax.org/l/pollination) to review self-pollination and cross-pollination.