

Article 9: Caterpillar Cannibalism

Some plants have been found to use nature's dog-eat-dog world to their advantage, forcing herbivores to become **cannibals** when the plants feel threatened by a caterpillar's **endless** appetite.

A new **study** published in the *Nature Ecology and Evolution* journal found that when some plants are under attack from hungry herbivores, they **emit** defenses that make themselves incredibly **foul-tasting** to caterpillars, which spurs the caterpillars to eat each other.

"Plants can defend themselves so much that they **food-stress** the herbivore, and then the herbivores **determine** that rather than have plants on their menu, they should have caterpillars at the top of their menu," said John Orrock, the author of the study and a researcher in the Department of Zoology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

This phenomenon has been **documented** in a variety of plants, and research has suggested that plants can sense when surrounding plants are under attack, which can **spur** the production of methyl jasmonate in entire communities of plants.

Methyl jasmonate is a substance plants produce in response to environmental stresses—to trigger the plants' defense mechanisms. This chemical allows the plant to change its chemistry, which makes it less appetizing to the beet armyworm caterpillars that are placed on a treated plant.

nationalgeographic.com/news/2017/07/caterpillar-cannibalism-plant-defense-spd/

Listen to the audio and match the words with their meanings

| | |
|--------------|--|
| cannibals | interrelationship between organism and environment |
| endless | decide |
| study | offensive to the senses |
| ecology | research |
| emit | written |
| foul-tasting | expel |
| food-stress | stimulate |
| determine | one that eats the flesh of their own kind |
| documented | stress that effect food preferences |
| spur | seeming to be without end |

Read why armyworms are considered the
"corona virus" of agriculture [HERE](#)