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Researchers plant space-bred seeds returned by Shenzhou XIII

Chinese researchers have commenced experiments on 12,000 seeds that were bred inside the Shenzhou XIII crewed spaceship for six months.

The seeds, including alfalfa, oats and fungi, were selected by multiple research institutions last year. They were brought back to Earth by Shenzhou XIII on April 16.

Space breeding refers to the process of exposing seeds to cosmic radiation and microgravity during a space mission to mutate seed genes and then sending them back to Earth to generate new species.

The space breeding tests have

been carried out in all the flight missions during the essential technology verification phase of China's space station project. Thousands of crop seeds and microorganisms from 88 organizations were carried into space and returned to Earth by Shenzhou XII and Shenzhou XIII.

Researchers at M-Grass, a tech enterprise in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, have conducted experiments on six grass strains from Shenzhou XIII. It is the second time the company has sent seeds into space, following the return of

mutated grass species with the Chang'e 5 lunar probe in 2020.

After further selection and planting, superior seed varieties will be used for ecological restoration and urban landscape construction, said Liu Siyang, a senior researcher at the company.

On Oct 16, the Shenzhou XIII mission sent three astronauts to China's space station core module for a six-month stay — the longest duration in the country's crewed space program. Crew members completed several experiments during the flight.

XINHUA