

## Innocent victims: The GMO 'petunia carnage' of 2017

[In 2015], plant biologist Teemu Teeri was walking by a train station in Helsinki when he noticed some vivid orange petunias in a planter. The flowers reminded Teeri, who has studied plant pigments at the University of Helsinki, of blooms created in a landmark gene-engineering experiment some 30 years earlier. As far as he knew, those flowers never made it to market. But he was curious, and he stuck a stem in his backpack.

Now, that chance encounter has ended up forcing flower sellers on two continents to destroy vast numbers of petunias. Teeri ultimately confirmed that the plants contained foreign DNA, and he tipped off regulators in Europe and the United States, who have identified other commercial strains that are genetically engineered (GE). Although officials say the GE petunias pose no threat to human health or the environment—and likely were unknowingly sold for years—they've asked sellers to destroy the flowers, because it's illegal to sell them in the United States and Europe without a permit.

Ironically, proposed revisions to U.S. biotechnology rules now under discussion might have exempted the harmless petunias from regulation. But the petunia carnage highlights the growing complexity of regulating GE plants, which have a long history of showing up where they aren't allowed and can be hard to track.

**The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion, and analysis. Read full, original post: [How the transgenic petunia carnage of 2017 began](#)**