

# 10

## Photosynthesis



▲ **Figure 10.1** How can sunlight, seen here as a spectrum of colors in a rainbow, power the synthesis of organic substances?

### KEY CONCEPTS

- 10.1 Photosynthesis converts light energy to the chemical energy of food
- 10.2 The light reactions convert solar energy to the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH
- 10.3 The Calvin cycle uses the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> to sugar
- 10.4 Alternative mechanisms of carbon fixation have evolved in hot, arid climates

### OVERVIEW

## The Process That Feeds the Biosphere

Life on Earth is solar powered. The chloroplasts of plants capture light energy that has traveled 150 million kilometers from the sun and convert it to chemical energy that is stored in sugar and other organic molecules. This conversion process is called **photosynthesis**. Let's begin by placing photosynthesis in its ecological context.

Photosynthesis nourishes almost the entire living world directly or indirectly. An organism acquires the organic compounds it uses for energy and carbon skeletons by one of two major modes: autotrophic nutrition or heterotrophic nutrition. **Autotrophs** are “self-feeders” (*auto-* means “self,” and *trophos* means “feeder”); they sustain themselves without eating anything derived from other living beings. Autotrophs produce their organic molecules from CO<sub>2</sub> and other inorganic raw materials obtained from the environment. They are the ultimate sources of organic compounds for all nonautotrophic organisms, and for this reason, biologists refer to autotrophs as the *producers* of the biosphere.

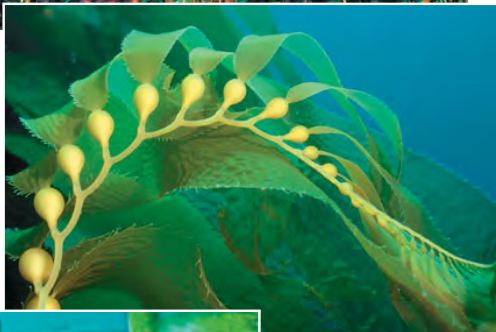
Almost all plants are autotrophs; the only nutrients they require are water and minerals from the soil and carbon dioxide from the air. Specifically, plants are *photoautotrophs*, organisms that use light as a source of energy to synthesize organic substances (**Figure 10.1**). Photosynthesis also occurs in algae, certain other protists, and some prokaryotes (**Figure 10.2**). In this chapter, we will touch on these other groups in passing, but our emphasis will be on plants. Variations in autotrophic nutrition that occur in prokaryotes and algae will be described in Chapters 27 and 28.

**Heterotrophs** obtain their organic material by the second major mode of nutrition. Unable to make their own food, they live on compounds produced by other organisms (*hetero-* means “other”). Heterotrophs are the biosphere's *consumers*. The most obvious form of this “other-feeding” occurs when an animal eats plants or other animals. But heterotrophic nutrition may be more subtle. Some heterotrophs consume the remains of dead organisms by decomposing and feeding on organic litter such as carcasses, feces, and fallen leaves; they are known as decomposers. Most fungi and many types of prokaryotes get their nourishment this way. Almost all heterotrophs, including humans, are completely dependent, either directly or indirectly, on photoautotrophs for food—and also for oxygen, a by-product of photosynthesis.

The Earth's supply of fossil fuels was formed from remains of organisms that died hundreds of millions of years ago. In a sense, then, fossil fuels represent stores of the sun's energy from the distant past. Because these resources are being used at a much higher rate than they are replenished, researchers



(a) Plants

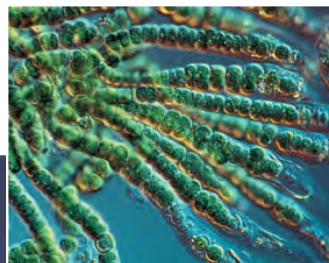


(b) Multicellular alga



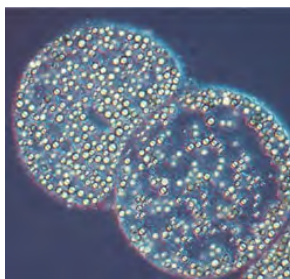
(c) Unicellular protists

10  $\mu\text{m}$



(d) Cyanobacteria

40  $\mu\text{m}$



(e) Purple sulfur bacteria

1  $\mu\text{m}$

**▲ Figure 10.2 Photoautotrophs.** These organisms use light energy to drive the synthesis of organic molecules from carbon dioxide and (in most cases) water. They feed themselves and the entire living world. (a) On land, plants are the predominant producers of food. In aquatic environments, photoautotrophs include unicellular and (b) multicellular algae, such as this kelp; (c) some non-algal unicellular protists, such as *Euglena*; (d) the prokaryotes called cyanobacteria; and (e) other photosynthetic prokaryotes, such as these purple sulfur bacteria, which produce sulfur (the yellow globules within the cells) (c–e, LMs).

▼ Figure 10.3

## IMPACT

### Alternative Fuels from Plants and Algae

Biofuels from crops such as corn, soybeans, and cassava have been proposed as a supplement or even replacement for fossil fuels. To produce “bioethanol,” the starch made naturally by the plants is simply converted to glucose and then fermented to ethanol by microorganisms. Alternatively, a simple chemical process can yield “biodiesel” from plant oils. Either product can be mixed with gasoline or used alone to power vehicles. Some species of unicellular algae are especially prolific oil producers, and they can be easily cultured in containers such as the tubular plastic bags shown below.



**WHY IT MATTERS** The rate of fossil fuel use by humans far outpaces its formation in the earth: Fossil fuels are a nonrenewable source of energy. Tapping the power of sunlight by using products of photosynthesis to generate energy is a sustainable alternative if cost-effective techniques can be developed. It is generally agreed that using algae is preferable to growing crops for this purpose because this use of cropland diminishes the food supply and drives up food prices.

**FURTHER READING** A. L. Haag, Algae bloom again, *Nature* 447:520–521 (2007).

**WHAT IF?** The main product of fossil fuel combustion is  $\text{CO}_2$ , and this combustion is the source of the increase in atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  concentration. Scientists have proposed strategically situating containers of these algae near industrial plants, as shown above, or near highly congested city streets. Why does this arrangement make sense?

are exploring methods of capitalizing on the photosynthetic process to provide alternative fuels (Figure 10.3).

In this chapter, you will learn how photosynthesis works. After a discussion of the general principles of photosynthesis, we will consider the two stages of photosynthesis: the light reactions, in which solar energy is captured and transformed into chemical energy; and the Calvin cycle, in which the chemical energy is used to make organic molecules of food. Finally, we will consider a few aspects of photosynthesis from an evolutionary perspective.

## CONCEPT 10.1

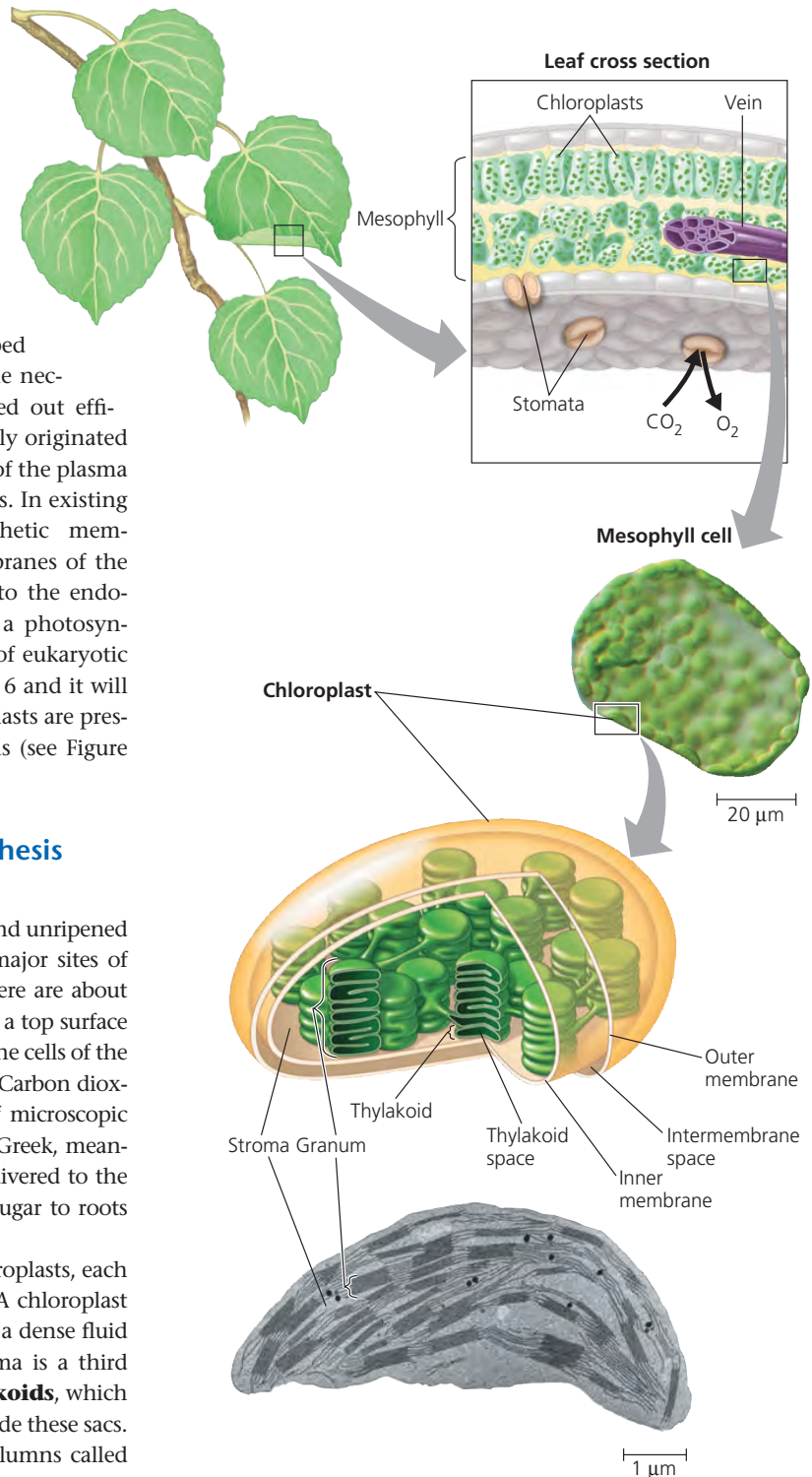
### Photosynthesis converts light energy to the chemical energy of food

The remarkable ability of an organism to harness light energy and use it to drive the synthesis of organic compounds emerges from structural organization in the cell: Photosynthetic enzymes and other molecules are grouped together in a biological membrane, enabling the necessary series of chemical reactions to be carried out efficiently. The process of photosynthesis most likely originated in a group of bacteria that had infolded regions of the plasma membrane containing clusters of such molecules. In existing photosynthetic bacteria, infolded photosynthetic membranes function similarly to the internal membranes of the chloroplast, a eukaryotic organelle. According to the endosymbiont theory, the original chloroplast was a photosynthetic prokaryote that lived inside an ancestor of eukaryotic cells. (You learned about this theory in Chapter 6 and it will be described more fully in Chapter 25.) Chloroplasts are present in a variety of photosynthesizing organisms (see Figure 10.2), but here we will focus on plants.

#### Chloroplasts: The Sites of Photosynthesis in Plants

All green parts of a plant, including green stems and unripened fruit, have chloroplasts, but the leaves are the major sites of photosynthesis in most plants (Figure 10.4). There are about half a million chloroplasts in a chunk of leaf with a top surface area of 1 mm<sup>2</sup>. Chloroplasts are found mainly in the cells of the **mesophyll**, the tissue in the interior of the leaf. Carbon dioxide enters the leaf, and oxygen exits, by way of microscopic pores called **stomata** (singular, *stoma*; from the Greek, meaning “mouth”). Water absorbed by the roots is delivered to the leaves in veins. Leaves also use veins to export sugar to roots and other nonphotosynthetic parts of the plant.

A typical mesophyll cell has about 30–40 chloroplasts, each organelle measuring about 2–4 μm by 4–7 μm. A chloroplast has an envelope of two membranes surrounding a dense fluid called the **stroma**. Suspended within the stroma is a third membrane system, made up of sacs called **thylakoids**, which segregates the stroma from the *thylakoid space* inside these sacs. In some places, thylakoid sacs are stacked in columns called *grana* (singular, *granum*). **Chlorophyll**, the green pigment that gives leaves their color, resides in the thylakoid membranes of the chloroplast. (The internal photosynthetic membranes of some prokaryotes are also called thylakoid membranes; see Figure 27.7b.) It is the light energy absorbed



▲ **Figure 10.4 Zooming in on the location of photosynthesis in a plant.** Leaves are the major organs of photosynthesis in plants. These pictures take you into a leaf, then into a cell, and finally into a chloroplast, the organelle where photosynthesis occurs (middle, LM; bottom, TEM).

by chlorophyll that drives the synthesis of organic molecules in the chloroplast. Now that we have looked at the sites of photosynthesis in plants, we are ready to look more closely at the process of photosynthesis.

### Tracking Atoms Through Photosynthesis: Scientific Inquiry

Scientists have tried for centuries to piece together the process by which plants make food. Although some of the steps are still not completely understood, the overall photosynthetic equation has been known since the 1800s: In the presence of light, the green parts of plants produce organic compounds and oxygen from carbon dioxide and water. Using molecular formulas, we can summarize the complex series of chemical reactions in photosynthesis with this chemical equation:

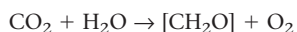


We use glucose ( $\text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6$ ) here to simplify the relationship between photosynthesis and respiration, but the direct product of photosynthesis is actually a three-carbon sugar that can be used to make glucose. Water appears on both sides of the equation because 12 molecules are consumed and 6 molecules are newly formed during photosynthesis. We can simplify the equation by indicating only the net consumption of water:



Writing the equation in this form, we can see that the overall chemical change during photosynthesis is the reverse of the one that occurs during cellular respiration. Both of these metabolic processes occur in plant cells. However, as you will soon learn, chloroplasts do not synthesize sugars by simply reversing the steps of respiration.

Now let's divide the photosynthetic equation by 6 to put it in its simplest possible form:



Here, the brackets indicate that  $\text{CH}_2\text{O}$  is not an actual sugar but represents the general formula for a carbohydrate. In other words, we are imagining the synthesis of a sugar molecule one carbon at a time. Six repetitions would theoretically produce a glucose molecule. Let's now use this simplified formula to see how researchers tracked the elements C, H, and O from the reactants of photosynthesis to the products.

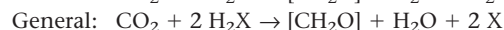
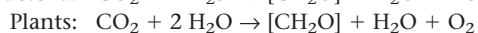
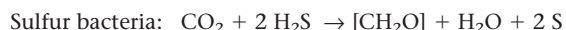
#### The Splitting of Water

One of the first clues to the mechanism of photosynthesis came from the discovery that the  $\text{O}_2$  given off by plants is derived from  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and not from  $\text{CO}_2$ . The chloroplast splits water into hydrogen and oxygen. Before this discovery, the prevailing hypothesis was that photosynthesis split carbon dioxide ( $\text{CO}_2 \rightarrow \text{C} + \text{O}_2$ ) and then added water to the carbon

( $\text{C} + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow [\text{CH}_2\text{O}]$ ). This hypothesis predicted that the  $\text{O}_2$  released during photosynthesis came from  $\text{CO}_2$ . This idea was challenged in the 1930s by C. B. van Niel, of Stanford University. Van Niel was investigating photosynthesis in bacteria that make their carbohydrate from  $\text{CO}_2$  but do not release  $\text{O}_2$ . He concluded that, at least in these bacteria,  $\text{CO}_2$  is not split into carbon and oxygen. One group of bacteria used hydrogen sulfide ( $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ) rather than water for photosynthesis, forming yellow globules of sulfur as a waste product (these globules are visible in Figure 10.2e). Here is the chemical equation for photosynthesis in these sulfur bacteria:

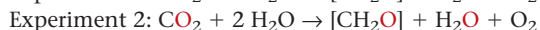


Van Niel reasoned that the bacteria split  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$  and used the hydrogen atoms to make sugar. He then generalized that idea, proposing that all photosynthetic organisms require a hydrogen source but that the source varies:

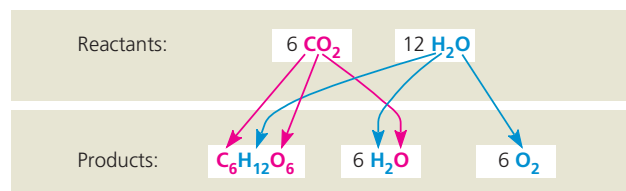


Thus, van Niel hypothesized that plants split  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  as a source of electrons from hydrogen atoms, releasing  $\text{O}_2$  as a by-product.

Nearly 20 years later, scientists confirmed van Niel's hypothesis by using oxygen-18 ( $^{18}\text{O}$ ), a heavy isotope, as a tracer to follow the fate of oxygen atoms during photosynthesis. The experiments showed that the  $\text{O}_2$  from plants was labeled with  $^{18}\text{O}$  *only* if water was the source of the tracer (experiment 1). If the  $^{18}\text{O}$  was introduced to the plant in the form of  $\text{CO}_2$ , the label did not turn up in the released  $\text{O}_2$  (experiment 2). In the following summary, red denotes labeled atoms of oxygen ( $^{18}\text{O}$ ):



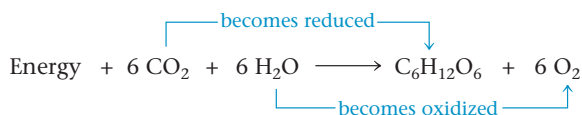
A significant result of the shuffling of atoms during photosynthesis is the extraction of hydrogen from water and its incorporation into sugar. The waste product of photosynthesis,  $\text{O}_2$ , is released to the atmosphere. **Figure 10.5** shows the fates of all atoms in photosynthesis.



▲ **Figure 10.5 Tracking atoms through photosynthesis.** The atoms from  $\text{CO}_2$  are shown in magenta, and the atoms from  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  are shown in blue.

## Photosynthesis as a Redox Process

Let's briefly compare photosynthesis with cellular respiration. Both processes involve redox reactions. During cellular respiration, energy is released from sugar when electrons associated with hydrogen are transported by carriers to oxygen, forming water as a by-product (see p. 164). The electrons lose potential energy as they “fall” down the electron transport chain toward electronegative oxygen, and the mitochondrion harnesses that energy to synthesize ATP (see Figure 9.15). Photosynthesis reverses the direction of electron flow. Water is split, and electrons are transferred along with hydrogen ions from the water to carbon dioxide, reducing it to sugar.



Because the electrons increase in potential energy as they move from water to sugar, this process requires energy—in other words is endergonic. This energy boost is provided by light.

## The Two Stages of Photosynthesis: A Preview

The equation for photosynthesis is a deceptively simple summary of a very complex process. Actually, photosynthesis is not a single process, but two processes, each with multiple steps. These two stages of photosynthesis are known as the

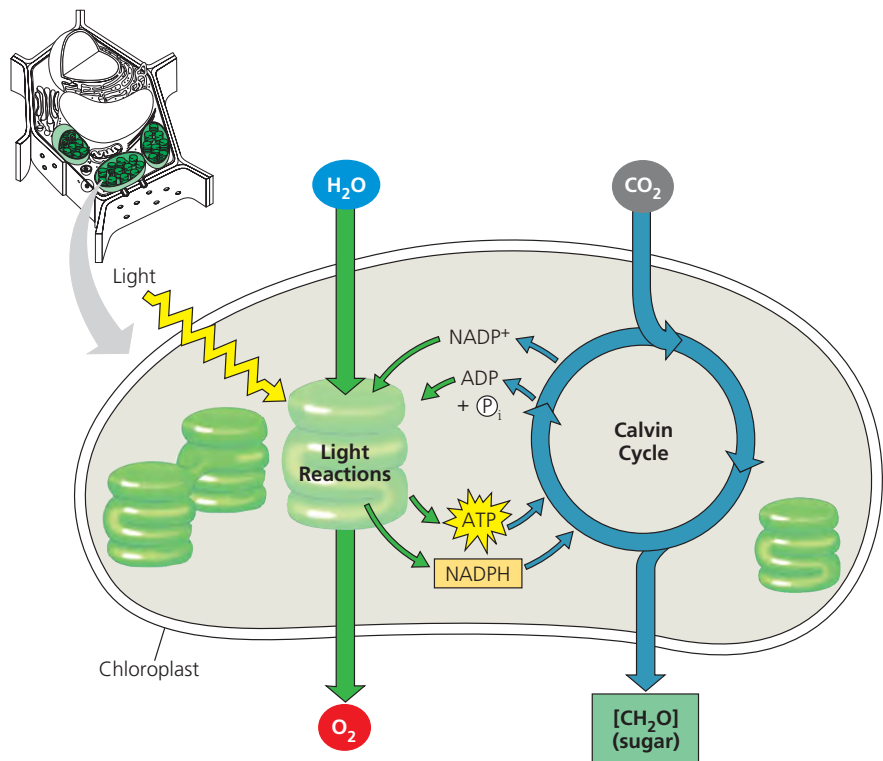
**light reactions** (the *photo* part of photosynthesis) and the **Calvin cycle** (the *synthesis* part) (Figure 10.6).

The light reactions are the steps of photosynthesis that convert solar energy to chemical energy. Water is split, providing a source of electrons and protons (hydrogen ions,  $\text{H}^+$ ) and giving off  $\text{O}_2$  as a by-product. Light absorbed by chlorophyll drives a transfer of the electrons and hydrogen ions from water to an acceptor called **NADP<sup>+</sup>** (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate), where they are temporarily stored. The electron acceptor NADP<sup>+</sup> is first cousin to NAD<sup>+</sup>, which functions as an electron carrier in cellular respiration; the two molecules differ only by the presence of an extra phosphate group in the NADP<sup>+</sup> molecule. The light reactions use solar power to reduce NADP<sup>+</sup> to NADPH by adding a pair of electrons along with an  $\text{H}^+$ . The light reactions also generate ATP, using chemiosmosis to power the addition of a phosphate group to ADP, a process called **photophosphorylation**. Thus, light energy is initially converted to chemical energy in the form of two compounds: NADPH, a source of electrons as “reducing power” that can be passed along to an electron acceptor, reducing it, and ATP, the versatile energy currency of cells. Notice that the light reactions produce no sugar; that happens in the second stage of photosynthesis, the Calvin cycle.

The Calvin cycle is named for Melvin Calvin, who, along with his colleagues, began to elucidate its steps in the late 1940s. The cycle begins by incorporating  $\text{CO}_2$  from the air

► **Figure 10.6 An overview of photosynthesis: cooperation of the light reactions and the Calvin cycle.** In the chloroplast, the thylakoid membranes are the sites of the light reactions, whereas the Calvin cycle occurs in the stroma. The light reactions use solar energy to make ATP and NADPH, which supply chemical energy and reducing power, respectively, to the Calvin cycle. The Calvin cycle incorporates  $\text{CO}_2$  into organic molecules, which are converted to sugar. (Recall that most simple sugars have formulas that are some multiple of  $\text{CH}_2\text{O}$ .)

**ANIMATION** **BioFlix** Visit the Study Area at [www.masteringbiology.com](http://www.masteringbiology.com) for the BioFlix® 3-D Animation on Photosynthesis.



into organic molecules already present in the chloroplast. This initial incorporation of carbon into organic compounds is known as **carbon fixation**. The Calvin cycle then reduces the fixed carbon to carbohydrate by the addition of electrons. The reducing power is provided by NADPH, which acquired its cargo of electrons in the light reactions. To convert  $\text{CO}_2$  to carbohydrate, the Calvin cycle also requires chemical energy in the form of ATP, which is also generated by the light reactions. Thus, it is the Calvin cycle that makes sugar, but it can do so only with the help of the NADPH and ATP produced by the light reactions. The metabolic steps of the Calvin cycle are sometimes referred to as the dark reactions, or light-independent reactions, because none of the steps requires light *directly*. Nevertheless, the Calvin cycle in most plants occurs during daylight, for only then can the light reactions provide the NADPH and ATP that the Calvin cycle requires. In essence, the chloroplast uses light energy to make sugar by coordinating the two stages of photosynthesis.

As Figure 10.6 indicates, the thylakoids of the chloroplast are the sites of the light reactions, while the Calvin cycle occurs in the stroma. On the outside of the thylakoids, molecules of  $\text{NADP}^+$  and ADP pick up electrons and phosphate, respectively, and NADPH and ATP are then released to the stroma, where they play crucial roles in the Calvin cycle. The two stages of photosynthesis are treated in this figure as metabolic modules that take in ingredients and crank out products. In the next two sections, we'll look more closely at how the two stages work, beginning with the light reactions.

### CONCEPT CHECK 10.1

1. How do the reactant molecules of photosynthesis reach the chloroplasts in leaves?
2. How did the use of an oxygen isotope help elucidate the chemistry of photosynthesis?
3. **WHAT IF?** The Calvin cycle requires ATP and NADPH, products of the light reactions. If a classmate asserted that the light reactions don't depend on the Calvin cycle and, with continual light, could just keep on producing ATP and NADPH, how would you respond?

For suggested answers, see Appendix A.

### CONCEPT 10.2

## The light reactions convert solar energy to the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH

Chloroplasts are chemical factories powered by the sun. Their thylakoids transform light energy into the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH. To understand this conversion better, we need to know about some important properties of light.

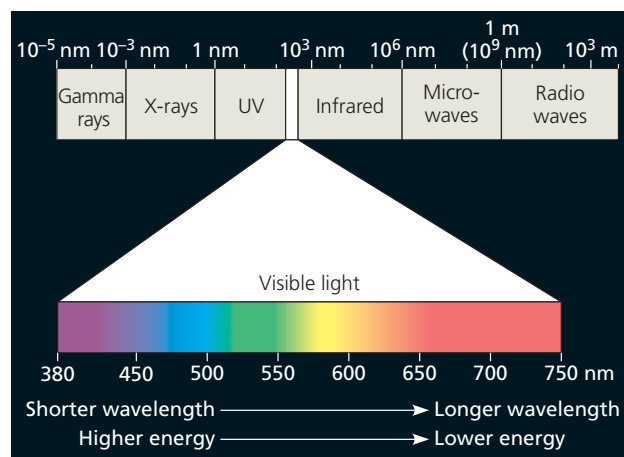
## The Nature of Sunlight

Light is a form of energy known as electromagnetic energy, also called electromagnetic radiation. Electromagnetic energy travels in rhythmic waves analogous to those created by dropping a pebble into a pond. Electromagnetic waves, however, are disturbances of electric and magnetic fields rather than disturbances of a material medium such as water.

The distance between the crests of electromagnetic waves is called the **wavelength**. Wavelengths range from less than a nanometer (for gamma rays) to more than a kilometer (for radio waves). This entire range of radiation is known as the **electromagnetic spectrum** (Figure 10.7). The segment most important to life is the narrow band from about 380 nm to 750 nm in wavelength. This radiation is known as **visible light** because it can be detected as various colors by the human eye.

The model of light as waves explains many of light's properties, but in certain respects light behaves as though it consists of discrete particles, called **photons**. Photons are not tangible objects, but they act like objects in that each of them has a fixed quantity of energy. The amount of energy is inversely related to the wavelength of the light: the shorter the wavelength, the greater the energy of each photon of that light. Thus, a photon of violet light packs nearly twice as much energy as a photon of red light.

Although the sun radiates the full spectrum of electromagnetic energy, the atmosphere acts like a selective window, allowing visible light to pass through while screening out a substantial fraction of other radiation. The part of the spectrum we can see—visible light—is also the radiation that drives photosynthesis.

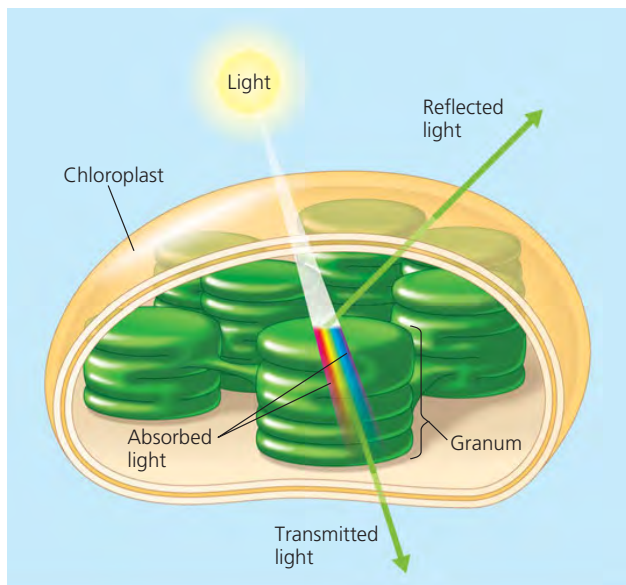


▲ **Figure 10.7 The electromagnetic spectrum.** White light is a mixture of all wavelengths of visible light. A prism can sort white light into its component colors by bending light of different wavelengths at different angles. (Droplets of water in the atmosphere can act as prisms, forming a rainbow; see Figure 10.1.) Visible light drives photosynthesis.

## Photosynthetic Pigments: The Light Receptors

When light meets matter, it may be reflected, transmitted, or absorbed. Substances that absorb visible light are known as *pigments*. Different pigments absorb light of different wavelengths, and the wavelengths that are absorbed disappear. If a pigment is illuminated with white light, the color we see is the color most reflected or transmitted by the pigment. (If a pigment absorbs all wavelengths, it appears black.) We see green when we look at a leaf because chlorophyll absorbs violet-blue and red light while transmitting and reflecting green light (Figure 10.8). The ability of a pigment to absorb various wavelengths of light can be measured with an instrument called a **spectrophotometer**. This machine directs beams of light of different wavelengths through a solution of the pigment and measures the fraction of the light transmitted at each wavelength. A graph plotting a pigment's light absorption versus wavelength is called an **absorption spectrum** (Figure 10.9).

The absorption spectra of chloroplast pigments provide clues to the relative effectiveness of different wavelengths for driving photosynthesis, since light can perform work in chloroplasts only if it is absorbed. Figure 10.10a shows the absorption spectra of three types of pigments in chloroplasts: **chlorophyll *a***, which participates directly in the light reactions; the accessory pigment *chlorophyll *b**; and a group of accessory pigments called carotenoids. The spectrum of chlorophyll *a* suggests that violet-blue and red light work best for photosynthesis, since they are absorbed, while green is the least effective



▲ **Figure 10.8 Why leaves are green: interaction of light with chloroplasts.** The chlorophyll molecules of chloroplasts absorb violet-blue and red light (the colors most effective in driving photosynthesis) and reflect or transmit green light. This is why leaves appear green.

### ▼ Figure 10.9

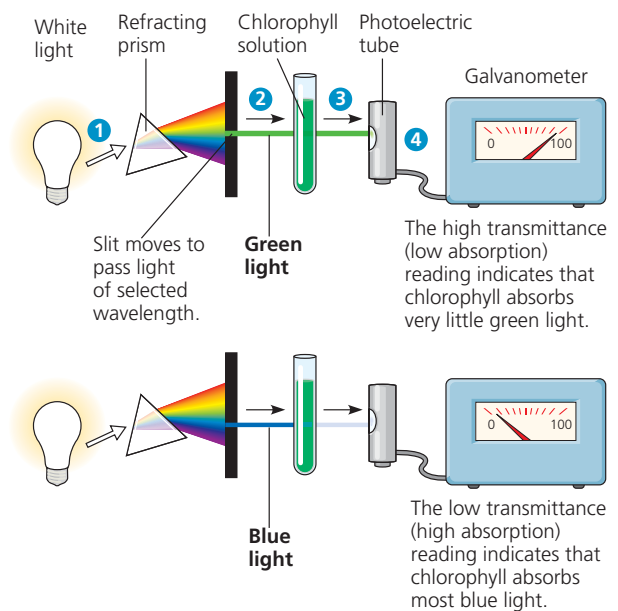
## RESEARCH METHOD

### Determining an Absorption Spectrum

**APPLICATION** An absorption spectrum is a visual representation of how well a particular pigment absorbs different wavelengths of visible light. Absorption spectra of various chloroplast pigments help scientists decipher each pigment's role in a plant.

**TECHNIQUE** A spectrophotometer measures the relative amounts of light of different wavelengths absorbed and transmitted by a pigment solution.

- 1 White light is separated into colors (wavelengths) by a prism.
- 2 One by one, the different colors of light are passed through the sample (chlorophyll in this example). Green light and blue light are shown here.
- 3 The transmitted light strikes a photoelectric tube, which converts the light energy to electricity.
- 4 The electric current is measured by a galvanometer. The meter indicates the fraction of light transmitted through the sample, from which we can determine the amount of light absorbed.



**RESULTS** See Figure 10.10a for absorption spectra of three types of chloroplast pigments.

color. This is confirmed by an **action spectrum** for photosynthesis (Figure 10.10b), which profiles the relative effectiveness of different wavelengths of radiation in driving the process. An action spectrum is prepared by illuminating chloroplasts with light of different colors and then plotting wavelength against some measure of photosynthetic rate, such as CO<sub>2</sub> consumption or O<sub>2</sub> release. The action spectrum for photosynthesis was first demonstrated by Theodor W. Engelmann, a German botanist, in 1883. Before equipment for measuring O<sub>2</sub> levels had even been invented, Engelmann performed a

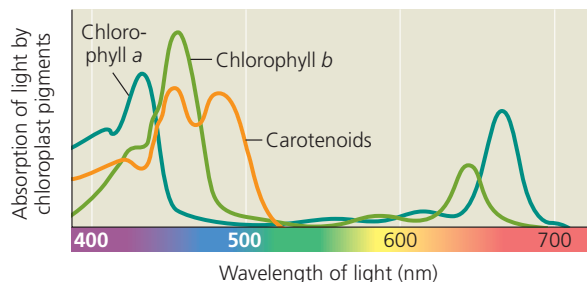
▼ **Figure 10.10**

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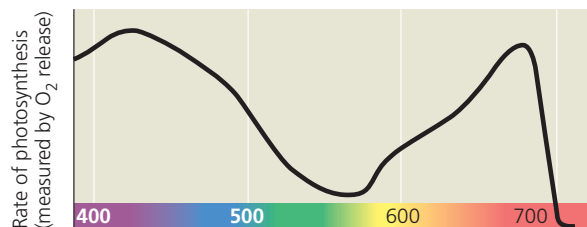
### Which wavelengths of light are most effective in driving photosynthesis?

**EXPERIMENT** Absorption and action spectra, along with a classic experiment by Theodor W. Engelmann, reveal which wavelengths of light are photosynthetically important.

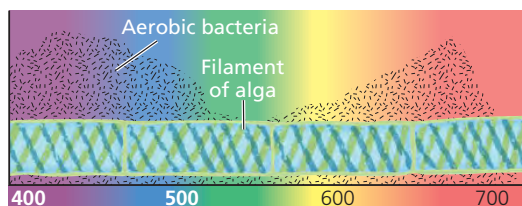
#### RESULTS



**(a) Absorption spectra.** The three curves show the wavelengths of light best absorbed by three types of chloroplast pigments.



**(b) Action spectrum.** This graph plots the rate of photosynthesis versus wavelength. The resulting action spectrum resembles the absorption spectrum for chlorophyll *a* but does not match exactly (see part a). This is partly due to the absorption of light by accessory pigments such as chlorophyll *b* and carotenoids.



**(c) Engelmann's experiment.** In 1883, Theodor W. Engelmann illuminated a filamentous alga with light that had been passed through a prism, exposing different segments of the alga to different wavelengths. He used aerobic bacteria, which concentrate near an oxygen source, to determine which segments of the alga were releasing the most  $O_2$  and thus photosynthesizing most. Bacteria congregated in greatest numbers around the parts of the alga illuminated with violet-blue or red light.

**CONCLUSION** Light in the violet-blue and red portions of the spectrum is most effective in driving photosynthesis.

**SOURCE** T. W. Engelmann, *Bacterium photometricum*. Ein Betrag zur vergleichenden Physiologie des Licht- und farbensinnes, *Archiv. für Physiologie* 30:95–124 (1883).

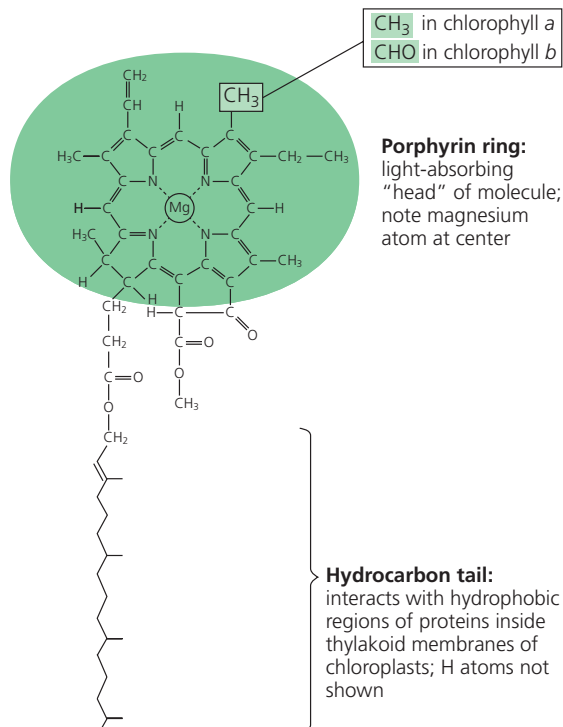
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**WHAT IF?** If Engelmann had used a filter that allowed only red light to pass through, how would the results have differed?

clever experiment in which he used bacteria to measure rates of photosynthesis in filamentous algae (**Figure 10.10c**). His results are a striking match to the modern action spectrum shown in Figure 10.10b.

Notice by comparing Figures 10.10a and 10.10b that the action spectrum for photosynthesis does not exactly match the absorption spectrum of chlorophyll *a*. The absorption spectrum of chlorophyll *a* alone underestimates the effectiveness of certain wavelengths in driving photosynthesis. This is partly because accessory pigments with different absorption spectra are also photosynthetically important in chloroplasts and broaden the spectrum of colors that can be used for photosynthesis. **Figure 10.11** shows the structure of chlorophyll *a* compared with that of chlorophyll *b*. A slight structural difference between them is enough to cause the two pigments to absorb at slightly different wavelengths in the red and blue parts of the spectrum (see Figure 10.10a). As a result, chlorophyll *a* is blue green and chlorophyll *b* is olive green.

Other accessory pigments include **carotenoids**, hydrocarbons that are various shades of yellow and orange because they absorb violet and blue-green light (see Figure 10.10a). Carotenoids may broaden the spectrum of colors that can drive photosynthesis. However, a more important function of at least some carotenoids seems to be *photoprotection*: These



▲ **Figure 10.11 Structure of chlorophyll molecules in chloroplasts of plants.** Chlorophyll *a* and chlorophyll *b* differ only in one of the functional groups bonded to the porphyrin ring. (Also see the space-filling model of chlorophyll in Figure 1.4, p. 5.)



compounds absorb and dissipate excessive light energy that would otherwise damage chlorophyll or interact with oxygen, forming reactive oxidative molecules that are dangerous to the cell. Interestingly, carotenoids similar to the photoprotective ones in chloroplasts have a photoprotective role in the human eye. These and related molecules, often found in health food products, are valued as “phytochemicals” (from the Greek *phyton*, plant), compounds with antioxidant properties. Plants can synthesize all the antioxidants they require, but humans and other animals must obtain some of them from their diets.

### Excitation of Chlorophyll by Light

What exactly happens when chlorophyll and other pigments absorb light? The colors corresponding to the absorbed wavelengths disappear from the spectrum of the transmitted and reflected light, but energy cannot disappear. When a molecule absorbs a photon of light, one of the molecule’s electrons is elevated to an orbital where it has more potential energy. When the electron is in its normal orbital, the pigment molecule is said to be in its ground state. Absorption of a photon boosts an electron to an orbital of higher energy, and the pigment molecule is then said to be in an excited state. The only photons absorbed are those whose energy is exactly equal to the energy difference between the ground state and an excited state, and this energy difference varies from one kind of molecule to another. Thus, a particular compound absorbs only photons corresponding to specific wavelengths, which is why each pigment has a unique absorption spectrum.

Once absorption of a photon raises an electron from the ground state to an excited state, the electron cannot remain there long. The excited state, like all high-energy states, is unstable. Generally, when isolated pigment molecules absorb

light, their excited electrons drop back down to the ground-state orbital in a billionth of a second, releasing their excess energy as heat. This conversion of light energy to heat is what makes the top of an automobile so hot on a sunny day. (White cars are coolest because their paint reflects all wavelengths of visible light, although it may absorb ultraviolet and other invisible radiation.) In isolation, some pigments, including chlorophyll, emit light as well as heat after absorbing photons. As excited electrons fall back to the ground state, photons are given off. This afterglow is called fluorescence. If a solution of chlorophyll isolated from chloroplasts is illuminated, it will fluoresce in the red-orange part of the spectrum and also give off heat (Figure 10.12).

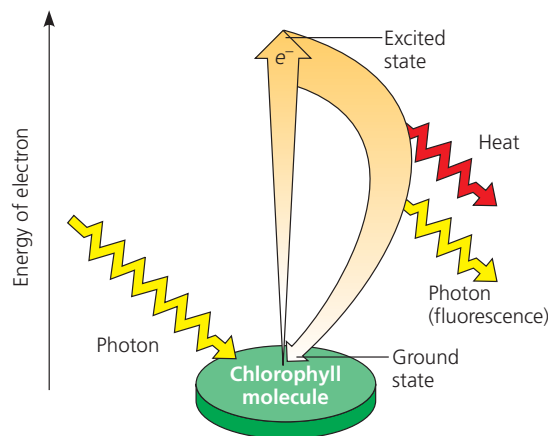
### A Photosystem: A Reaction-Center Complex Associated with Light-Harvesting Complexes

Chlorophyll molecules excited by the absorption of light energy produce very different results in an intact chloroplast than they do in isolation (see Figure 10.12). In their native environment of the thylakoid membrane, chlorophyll molecules are organized along with other small organic molecules and proteins into complexes called photosystems.

A **photosystem** is composed of a **reaction-center complex** surrounded by several light-harvesting complexes (Figure 10.13). The reaction-center complex is an organized association of proteins holding a special pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules. Each **light-harvesting complex** consists of various pigment molecules (which may include chlorophyll *a*, chlorophyll *b*, and carotenoids) bound to proteins. The number and variety of pigment molecules enable a photosystem to harvest light over a larger surface area and a larger portion of the spectrum than could any single pigment molecule alone. Together, these light-harvesting complexes act as an antenna for the reaction-center complex. When a pigment molecule

► **Figure 10.12 Excitation of isolated chlorophyll by light.** (a) Absorption of a photon causes a transition of the chlorophyll molecule from its ground state to its excited state. The photon boosts an electron to an orbital where it has more potential energy. If the illuminated molecule exists in isolation, its excited electron immediately drops back down to the ground-state orbital, and its excess energy is given off as heat and fluorescence (light). (b) A chlorophyll solution excited with ultraviolet light fluoresces with a red-orange glow.

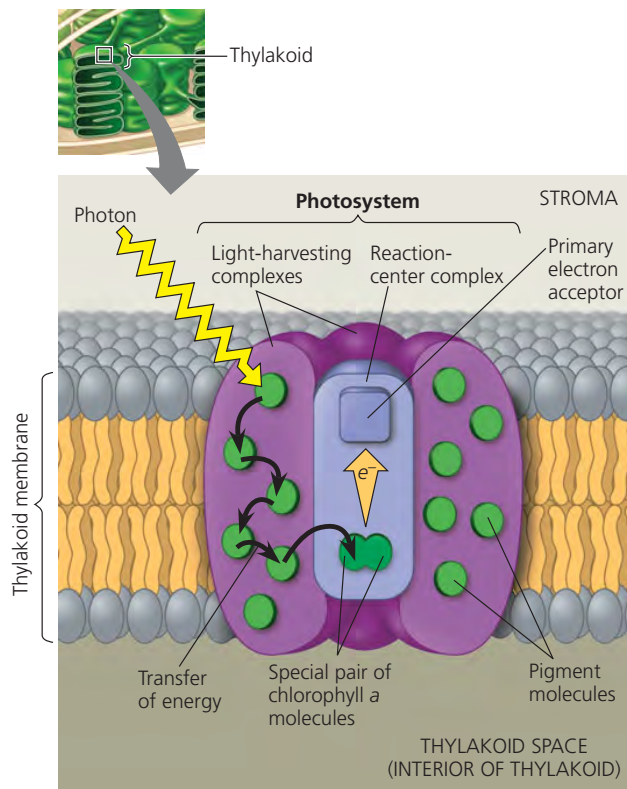
**WHAT IF?** If a leaf containing a similar concentration of chlorophyll as the solution was exposed to the same ultraviolet light, no fluorescence would be seen. Explain the difference in fluorescence emission between the solution and the leaf.



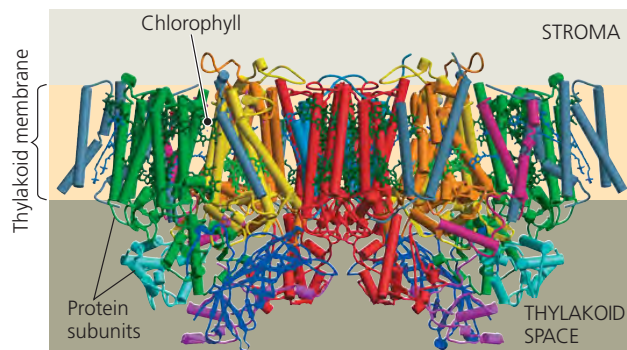
(a) Excitation of isolated chlorophyll molecule



(b) Fluorescence



**(a) How a photosystem harvests light.** When a photon strikes a pigment molecule in a light-harvesting complex, the energy is passed from molecule to molecule until it reaches the reaction-center complex. Here, an excited electron from the special pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules is transferred to the primary electron acceptor.



**(b) Structure of photosystem II.** This computer model of photosystem II, based on X-ray crystallography, shows two photosystem complexes side by side. Chlorophyll molecules (small green ball-and-stick models) are interspersed with protein subunits (cylinders and ribbons). For simplicity, photosystem II will be shown as a single complex in the rest of the chapter.

**▲ Figure 10.13 The structure and function of a photosystem.**

absorbs a photon, the energy is transferred from pigment molecule to pigment molecule within a light-harvesting complex, somewhat like a human “wave” at a sports arena, until it is passed into the reaction-center complex. The reaction-center complex also contains a molecule capable of accepting

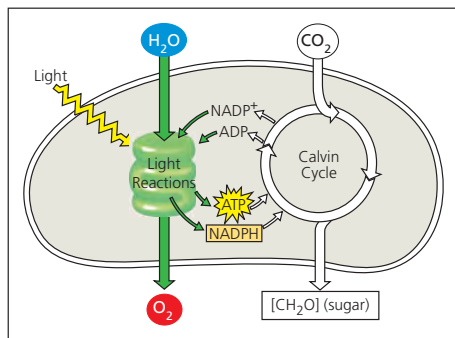
electrons and becoming reduced; this is called the **primary electron acceptor**. The pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules in the reaction-center complex are special because their molecular environment—their location and the other molecules with which they are associated—enables them to use the energy from light not only to boost one of their electrons to a higher energy level, but also to transfer it to a different molecule—the primary electron acceptor.

The solar-powered transfer of an electron from the reaction-center chlorophyll *a* pair to the primary electron acceptor is the first step of the light reactions. As soon as the chlorophyll electron is excited to a higher energy level, the primary electron acceptor captures it; this is a redox reaction. In the flask shown in Figure 10.12, isolated chlorophyll fluoresces because there is no electron acceptor, so electrons of photoexcited chlorophyll drop right back to the ground state. In the structured environment of a chloroplast, however, an electron acceptor is readily available, and the potential energy represented by the excited electron is not dissipated as light and heat. Thus, each photosystem—a reaction-center complex surrounded by light-harvesting complexes—functions in the chloroplast as a unit. It converts light energy to chemical energy, which will ultimately be used for the synthesis of sugar.

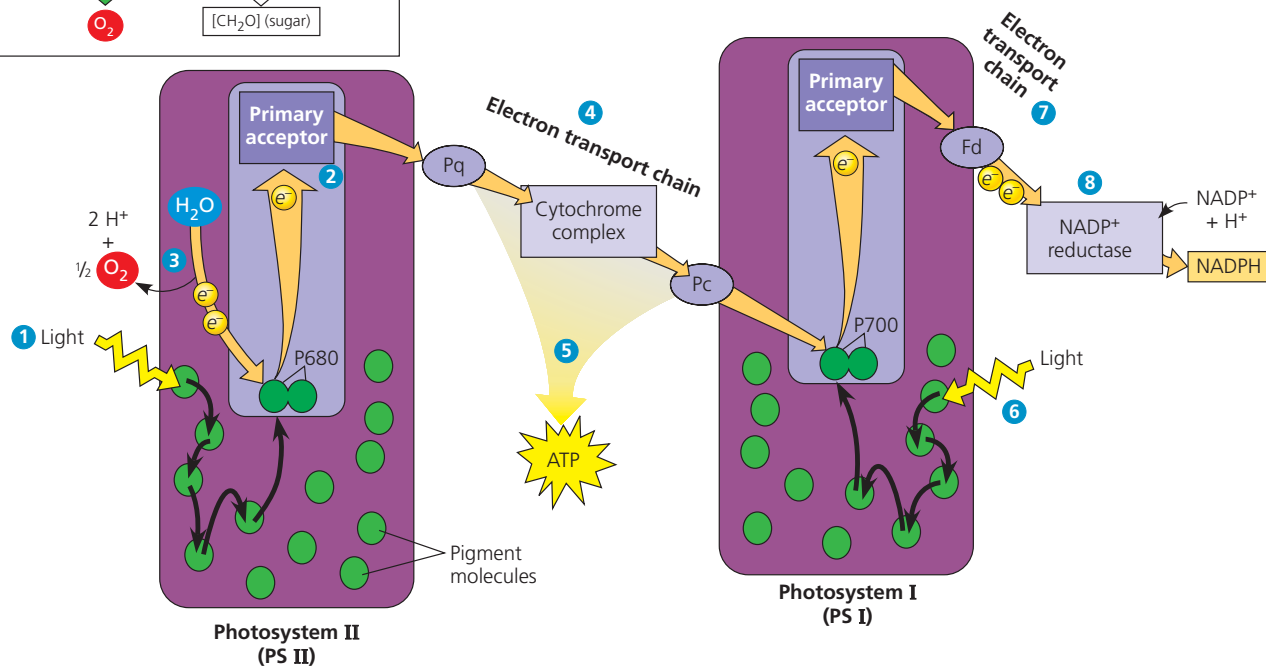
The thylakoid membrane is populated by two types of photosystems that cooperate in the light reactions of photosynthesis. They are called **photosystem II (PS II)** and **photosystem I (PS I)**. (They were named in order of their discovery, but photosystem II functions first in the light reactions.) Each has a characteristic reaction-center complex—a particular kind of primary electron acceptor next to a special pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules associated with specific proteins. The reaction-center chlorophyll *a* of photosystem II is known as P680 because this pigment is best at absorbing light having a wavelength of 680 nm (in the red part of the spectrum). The chlorophyll *a* at the reaction-center complex of photosystem I is called P700 because it most effectively absorbs light of wavelength 700 nm (in the far-red part of the spectrum). These two pigments, P680 and P700, are nearly identical chlorophyll *a* molecules. However, their association with different proteins in the thylakoid membrane affects the electron distribution in the two pigments and accounts for the slight differences in their light-absorbing properties. Now let’s see how the two photosystems work together in using light energy to generate ATP and NADPH, the two main products of the light reactions.

**Linear Electron Flow**

Light drives the synthesis of ATP and NADPH by energizing the two photosystems embedded in the thylakoid membranes of chloroplasts. The key to this energy transformation is a flow of electrons through the photosystems and other molecular components built into the thylakoid membrane. This is called



**▼ Figure 10.14** How linear electron flow during the light reactions generates ATP and NADPH. The gold arrows trace the current of light-driven electrons from water to NADPH.



**Linear electron flow**, and it occurs during the light reactions of photosynthesis, as shown in **Figure 10.14**. The following steps correspond to the numbered steps in the figure.

- 1 A photon of light strikes a pigment molecule in a light-harvesting complex of PS II, boosting one of its electrons to a higher energy level. As this electron falls back to its ground state, an electron in a nearby pigment molecule is simultaneously raised to an excited state. The process continues, with the energy being relayed to other pigment molecules until it reaches the P680 pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules in the PS II reaction-center complex. It excites an electron in this pair of chlorophylls to a higher energy state.
- 2 This electron is transferred from the excited P680 to the primary electron acceptor. We can refer to the resulting form of P680, missing an electron, as P680<sup>+</sup>.
- 3 An enzyme catalyzes the splitting of a water molecule into two electrons, two hydrogen ions (H<sup>+</sup>), and an oxygen atom. The electrons are supplied one by one to the P680<sup>+</sup> pair, each electron replacing one transferred to the primary electron acceptor. (P680<sup>+</sup> is the strongest biological oxidizing agent known; its electron “hole” must be filled. This greatly facilitates the transfer of electrons from the

split water molecule.) The H<sup>+</sup> are released into the thylakoid lumen. The oxygen atom immediately combines with an oxygen atom generated by the splitting of another water molecule, forming O<sub>2</sub>.

- 4 Each photoexcited electron passes from the primary electron acceptor of PS II to PS I via an electron transport chain, the components of which are similar to those of the electron transport chain that functions in cellular respiration. The electron transport chain between PS II and PS I is made up of the electron carrier plastoquinone (Pq), a cytochrome complex, and a protein called plastocyanin (Pc).
- 5 The exergonic “fall” of electrons to a lower energy level provides energy for the synthesis of ATP. As electrons pass through the cytochrome complex, H<sup>+</sup> are pumped into the thylakoid lumen, contributing to the proton gradient that is subsequently used in chemiosmosis.
- 6 Meanwhile, light energy has been transferred via light-harvesting complex pigments to the PS I reaction-center complex, exciting an electron of the P700 pair of chlorophyll *a* molecules located there. The photoexcited electron was then transferred to PS I’s primary electron acceptor, creating an electron “hole” in the P700—which

we now can call  $P700^+$ . In other words,  $P700^+$  can now act as an electron acceptor, accepting an electron that reaches the bottom of the electron transport chain from PS II.

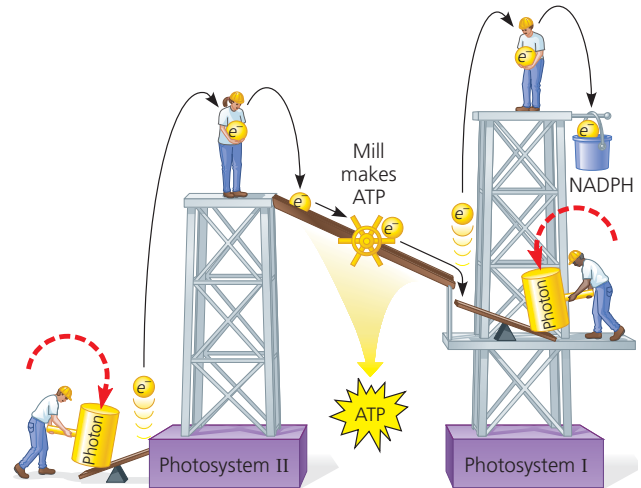
- 7 Photoexcited electrons are passed in a series of redox reactions from the primary electron acceptor of PS I down a second electron transport chain through the protein ferredoxin (Fd). (This chain does not create a proton gradient and thus does not produce ATP.)
- 8 The enzyme  $NADP^+$  reductase catalyzes the transfer of electrons from Fd to  $NADP^+$ . Two electrons are required for its reduction to NADPH. This molecule is at a higher energy level than water, and its electrons are more readily available for the reactions of the Calvin cycle than were those of water. This process also removes an  $H^+$  from the stroma.

As complicated as the scheme shown in Figure 10.14 is, do not lose track of its functions. The light reactions use solar power to generate ATP and NADPH, which provide chemical energy and reducing power, respectively, to the carbohydrate-synthesizing reactions of the Calvin cycle. The energy changes of electrons during their linear flow through the light reactions are shown in a mechanical analogy in Figure 10.15.

### Cyclic Electron Flow

In certain cases, photoexcited electrons can take an alternative path called **cyclic electron flow**, which uses photosystem I but not photosystem II. You can see in Figure 10.16 that cyclic flow is a short circuit: The electrons cycle back from ferredoxin (Fd) to the cytochrome complex and from there continue on to a  $P700$  chlorophyll in the PS I reaction-center complex. There is no production of NADPH and no release of oxygen. Cyclic flow does, however, generate ATP.

Several of the currently existing groups of photosynthetic bacteria are known to have photosystem I but not photosystem II; for these species, which include the purple sulfur bacteria (see Figure 10.2e), cyclic electron flow is the sole means of generating ATP in photosynthesis. Evolutionary biologists hypothesize that these bacterial groups are descendants of

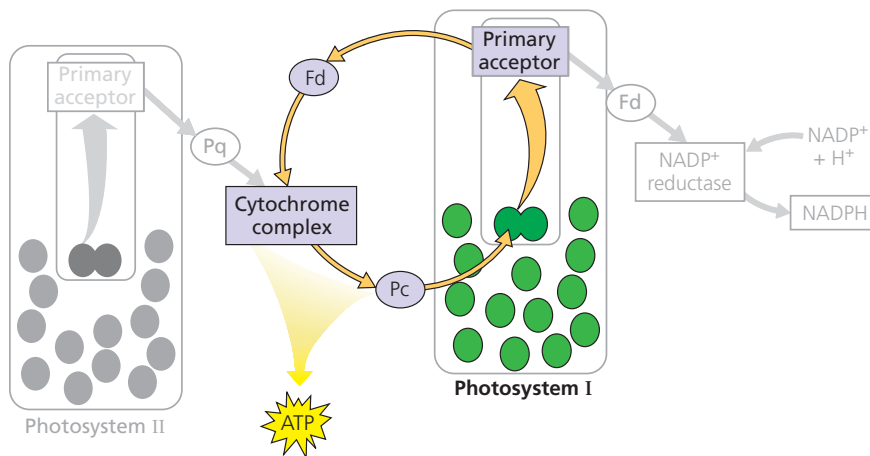


▲ **Figure 10.15** A mechanical analogy for linear electron flow during the light reactions.

the bacteria in which photosynthesis first evolved, in a form similar to cyclic electron flow.

Cyclic electron flow can also occur in photosynthetic species that possess both photosystems; this includes some prokaryotes, such as the cyanobacteria shown in Figure 10.2d, as well as the eukaryotic photosynthetic species that have been tested so far. Although the process is probably in part an “evolutionary leftover,” it clearly plays at least one beneficial role for these organisms. Mutant plants that are not able to carry out cyclic electron flow are capable of growing well in low light, but do not grow well where light is intense. This is evidence for the idea that cyclic electron flow may be photoprotective. Later you’ll learn more about cyclic electron flow as it relates to a particular adaptation of photosynthesis ( $C_4$  plants; see Concept 10.4).

Whether ATP synthesis is driven by linear or cyclic electron flow, the actual mechanism is the same. Before we move on to consider the Calvin cycle, let’s review chemiosmosis, the process that uses membranes to couple redox reactions to ATP production.



◀ **Figure 10.16** Cyclic electron flow. Photoexcited electrons from PS I are occasionally shunted back from ferredoxin (Fd) to chlorophyll via the cytochrome complex and plastocyanin (Pc). This electron shunt supplements the supply of ATP (via chemiosmosis) but produces no NADPH. The “shadow” of linear electron flow is included in the diagram for comparison with the cyclic route. The two ferredoxin molecules shown in this diagram are actually one and the same—the final electron carrier in the electron transport chain of PS I.

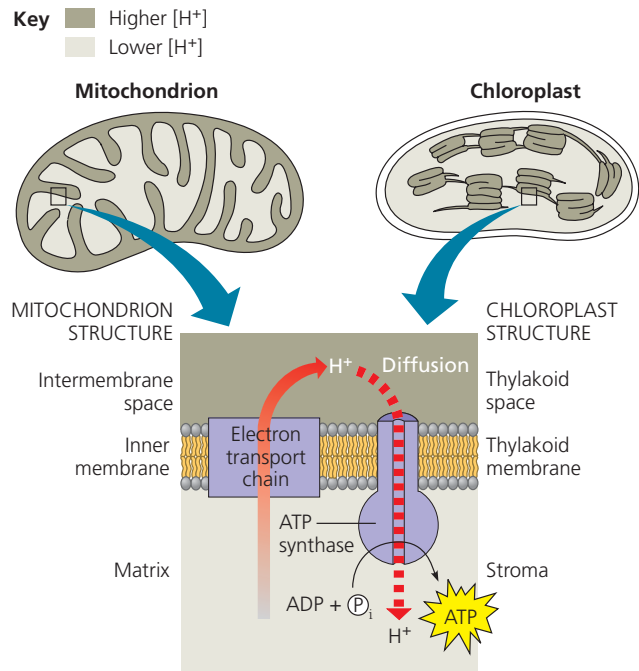
**?** Look at Figure 10.15, and explain how you would alter it to show a mechanical analogy for cyclic electron flow.

## A Comparison of Chemiosmosis in Chloroplasts and Mitochondria

Chloroplasts and mitochondria generate ATP by the same basic mechanism: chemiosmosis. An electron transport chain assembled in a membrane pumps protons across the membrane as electrons are passed through a series of carriers that are progressively more electronegative. In this way, electron transport chains transform redox energy to a proton-motive force, potential energy stored in the form of an  $H^+$  gradient across a membrane. Built into the same membrane is an ATP synthase complex that couples the diffusion of hydrogen ions down their gradient to the phosphorylation of ADP. Some of the electron carriers, including the iron-containing proteins called cytochromes, are very similar in chloroplasts and mitochondria. The ATP synthase complexes of the two organelles are also very much alike. But there are noteworthy differences between oxidative phosphorylation in mitochondria and photophosphorylation in chloroplasts. In mitochondria, the high-energy electrons dropped down the transport chain are extracted from organic molecules (which are thus oxidized), while in chloroplasts, the source of electrons is water. Chloroplasts do not need molecules from food to make ATP; their photosystems capture light energy and use it to drive the electrons from water to the top of the transport chain. In other words, mitochondria use chemiosmosis to transfer chemical energy from food molecules to ATP, whereas chloroplasts transform light energy into chemical energy in ATP.

Although the spatial organization of chemiosmosis differs slightly between chloroplasts and mitochondria, it is easy to see similarities in the two (Figure 10.17). The inner membrane of the mitochondrion pumps protons from the mitochondrial matrix out to the intermembrane space, which then serves as a reservoir of hydrogen ions. The thylakoid membrane of the chloroplast pumps protons from the stroma into the thylakoid space (interior of the thylakoid), which functions as the  $H^+$  reservoir. If you imagine the cristae of mitochondria pinching off from the inner membrane, this may help you see how the thylakoid space and the intermembrane space are comparable spaces in the two organelles, while the mitochondrial matrix is analogous to the stroma of the chloroplast. In the mitochondrion, protons diffuse down their concentration gradient from the intermembrane space through ATP synthase to the matrix, driving ATP synthesis. In the chloroplast, ATP is synthesized as the hydrogen ions diffuse from the thylakoid space back to the stroma through ATP synthase complexes, whose catalytic knobs are on the stroma side of the membrane. Thus, ATP forms in the stroma, where it is used to help drive sugar synthesis during the Calvin cycle (Figure 10.18).

The proton ( $H^+$ ) gradient, or pH gradient, across the thylakoid membrane is substantial. When chloroplasts in an

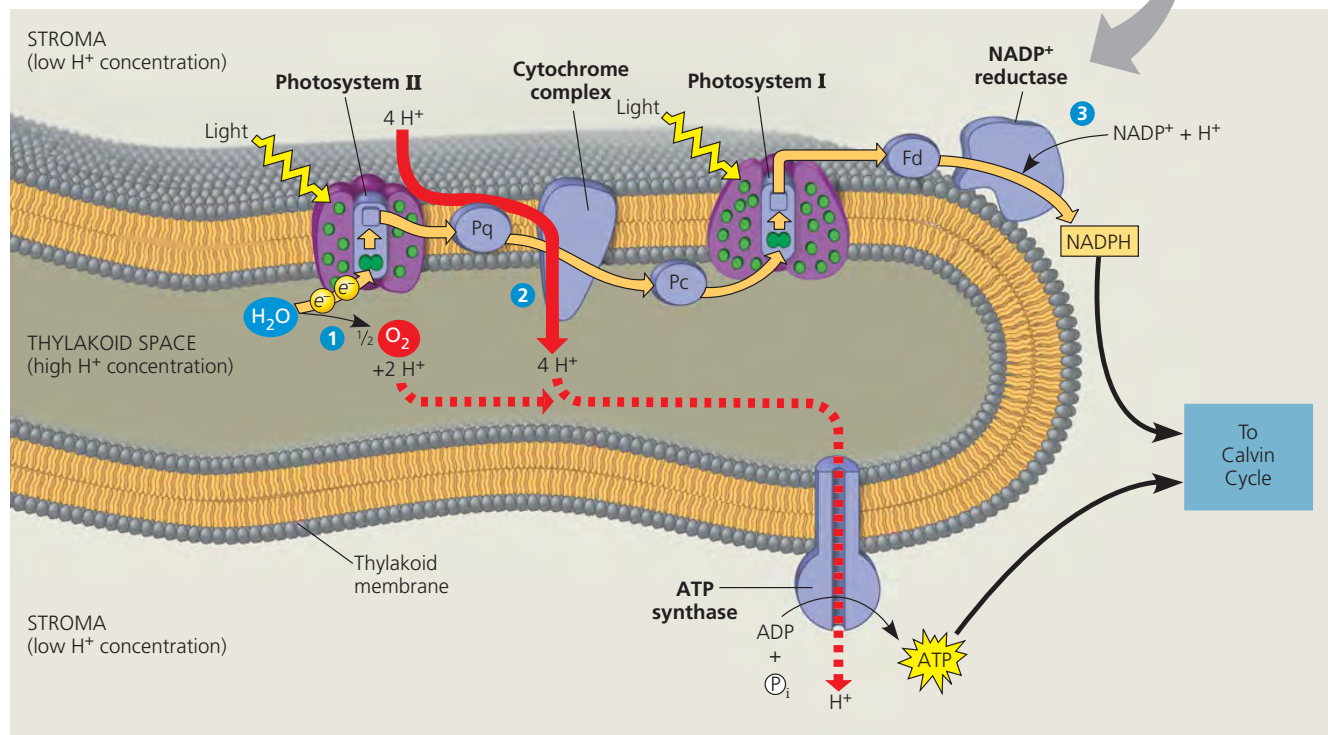
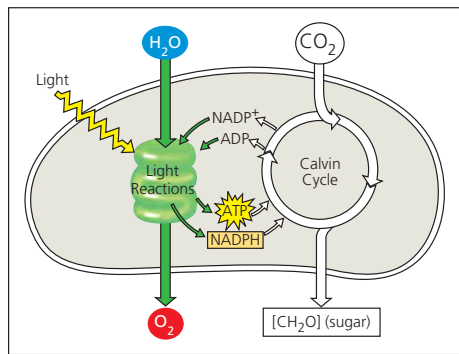


**▲ Figure 10.17 Comparison of chemiosmosis in mitochondria and chloroplasts.** In both kinds of organelles, electron transport chains pump protons ( $H^+$ ) across a membrane from a region of low  $H^+$  concentration (light gray in this diagram) to one of high  $H^+$  concentration (dark gray). The protons then diffuse back across the membrane through ATP synthase, driving the synthesis of ATP.

experimental setting are illuminated, the pH in the thylakoid space drops to about 5 (the  $H^+$  concentration increases), and the pH in the stroma increases to about 8 (the  $H^+$  concentration decreases). This gradient of three pH units corresponds to a thousandfold difference in  $H^+$  concentration. If in the laboratory the lights are turned off, the pH gradient is abolished, but it can quickly be restored by turning the lights back on. Experiments such as this provided strong evidence in support of the chemiosmotic model.

Based on studies in several laboratories, Figure 10.18 shows a current model for the organization of the light-reaction “machinery” within the thylakoid membrane. Each of the molecules and molecular complexes in the figure is present in numerous copies in each thylakoid. Notice that NADPH, like ATP, is produced on the side of the membrane facing the stroma, where the Calvin cycle reactions take place.

Let’s summarize the light reactions. Electron flow pushes electrons from water, where they are at a low state of potential energy, ultimately to NADPH, where they are stored at a high state of potential energy. The light-driven electron current also generates ATP. Thus, the equipment of the thylakoid membrane converts light energy to chemical energy stored in ATP and NADPH. (Oxygen is a by-product.) Let’s now see how the Calvin cycle uses the products of the light reactions to synthesize sugar from  $CO_2$ .



**▲ Figure 10.18 The light reactions and chemiosmosis: the organization of the thylakoid membrane.** This diagram shows a current model for the organization of the thylakoid membrane. The gold arrows track the linear electron flow outlined in Figure 10.14. As electrons pass from carrier to carrier in redox reactions, hydrogen ions removed from the stroma are deposited in the thylakoid space, storing

energy as a proton-motive force ( $H^+$  gradient). At least three steps in the light reactions contribute to the proton gradient: **1** Water is split by photosystem II on the side of the membrane facing the thylakoid space; **2** as plastoquinone (Pq), a mobile carrier, transfers electrons to the cytochrome complex, four protons are translocated across the membrane into the thylakoid space; and **3** a hydrogen ion is removed from the stroma when it is

taken up by  $NADP^+$ . Notice that in step 2, hydrogen ions are being pumped from the stroma into the thylakoid space, as in Figure 10.17. The diffusion of  $H^+$  from the thylakoid space back to the stroma (along the  $H^+$  concentration gradient) powers the ATP synthase. These light-driven reactions store chemical energy in NADPH and ATP, which shuttle the energy to the carbohydrate-producing Calvin cycle.

## CONCEPT CHECK 10.2

1. What color of light is *least* effective in driving photosynthesis? Explain.
2. Compared to a solution of isolated chlorophyll, why do intact chloroplasts release less heat and fluorescence when illuminated?
3. In the light reactions, what is the initial electron donor? Where do the electrons finally end up?

4. **WHAT IF?** In an experiment, isolated chloroplasts placed in an illuminated solution with the appropriate chemicals can carry out ATP synthesis. Predict what would happen to the rate of synthesis if a compound is added to the solution that makes membranes freely permeable to hydrogen ions.

For suggested answers, see Appendix A.

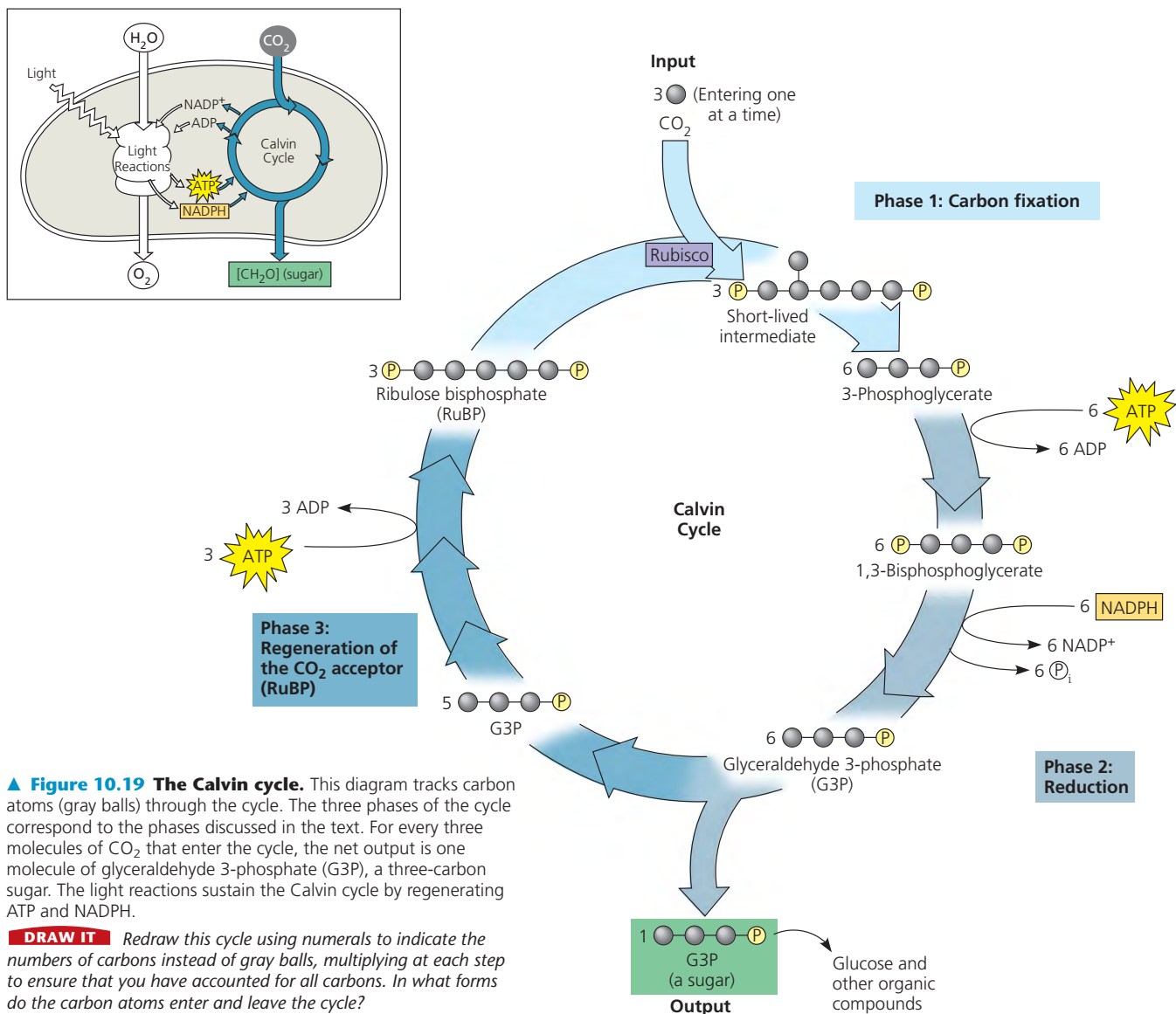
## CONCEPT 10.3

### The Calvin cycle uses the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> to sugar

The Calvin cycle is similar to the citric acid cycle in that a starting material is regenerated after molecules enter and leave the cycle. However, while the citric acid cycle is catabolic, oxidizing acetyl CoA and using the energy to synthesize ATP, the Calvin cycle is anabolic, building carbohydrates from smaller molecules and consuming energy. Carbon

enters the Calvin cycle in the form of CO<sub>2</sub> and leaves in the form of sugar. The cycle spends ATP as an energy source and consumes NADPH as reducing power for adding high-energy electrons to make the sugar.

As we mentioned previously, the carbohydrate produced directly from the Calvin cycle is actually not glucose, but a three-carbon sugar; the name of this sugar is **glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate (G3P)**. For the net synthesis of one molecule of G3P, the cycle must take place three times, fixing three molecules of CO<sub>2</sub>. (Recall that carbon fixation refers to the initial incorporation of CO<sub>2</sub> into organic material.) As we trace the steps of the cycle, keep in mind that we are following three molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> through the reactions. **Figure 10.19** divides



the Calvin cycle into three phases: carbon fixation, reduction, and regeneration of the CO<sub>2</sub> acceptor.

**Phase 1: Carbon fixation.** The Calvin cycle incorporates each CO<sub>2</sub> molecule, one at a time, by attaching it to a five-carbon sugar named ribulose biphosphate (abbreviated RuBP). The enzyme that catalyzes this first step is RuBP carboxylase, or **rubisco**. (This is the most abundant protein in chloroplasts and is also thought to be the most abundant protein on Earth.) The product of the reaction is a six-carbon intermediate so unstable that it immediately splits in half, forming two molecules of 3-phosphoglycerate (for each CO<sub>2</sub> fixed).

**Phase 2: Reduction.** Each molecule of 3-phosphoglycerate receives an additional phosphate group from ATP, becoming 1,3-bisphosphoglycerate. Next, a pair of electrons donated from NADPH reduces 1,3-bisphosphoglycerate, which also loses a phosphate group, becoming G3P. Specifically, the electrons from NADPH reduce a carboxyl group on 1,3-bisphosphoglycerate to the aldehyde group of G3P, which stores more potential energy. G3P is a sugar—the same three-carbon sugar formed in glycolysis by the splitting of glucose (see Figure 9.9). Notice in Figure 10.19 that for every *three* molecules of CO<sub>2</sub> that enter the cycle, there are *six* molecules of G3P formed. But only one molecule of this three-carbon sugar can be counted as a net gain of carbohydrate. The cycle began with 15 carbons' worth of carbohydrate in the form of three molecules of the five-carbon sugar RuBP. Now there are 18 carbons' worth of carbohydrate in the form of six molecules of G3P. One molecule exits the cycle to be used by the plant cell, but the other five molecules must be recycled to regenerate the three molecules of RuBP.

**Phase 3: Regeneration of the CO<sub>2</sub> acceptor (RuBP).** In a complex series of reactions, the carbon skeletons of five molecules of G3P are rearranged by the last steps of the Calvin cycle into three molecules of RuBP. To accomplish this, the cycle spends three more molecules of ATP. The RuBP is now prepared to receive CO<sub>2</sub> again, and the cycle continues.

For the net synthesis of one G3P molecule, the Calvin cycle consumes a total of nine molecules of ATP and six molecules of NADPH. The light reactions regenerate the ATP and NADPH. The G3P spun off from the Calvin cycle becomes the starting material for metabolic pathways that synthesize other organic compounds, including glucose and other carbohydrates. Neither the light reactions nor the Calvin cycle alone can make sugar from CO<sub>2</sub>. Photosynthesis is an emergent property of the intact chloroplast, which integrates the two stages of photosynthesis.

## CONCEPT CHECK 10.3

1. To synthesize one glucose molecule, the Calvin cycle uses \_\_\_\_\_ molecules of CO<sub>2</sub>, \_\_\_\_\_ molecules of ATP, and \_\_\_\_\_ molecules of NADPH.
2. Explain why the large numbers of ATP and NADPH molecules used during the Calvin cycle are consistent with the high value of glucose as an energy source.
3. **WHAT IF?** Explain why a poison that inhibits an enzyme of the Calvin cycle will also inhibit the light reactions.
4. **MAKE CONNECTIONS** Review Figures 9.9 (p. 169) and 10.19. Discuss the roles of intermediate and product played by glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate (G3P) in the two processes shown in these figures.

For suggested answers, see Appendix A.

## CONCEPT 10.4

### Alternative mechanisms of carbon fixation have evolved in hot, arid climates

**EVOLUTION** Ever since plants first moved onto land about 475 million years ago, they have been adapting to the problems of terrestrial life, particularly the problem of dehydration. In Chapters 29 and 36, we will consider anatomical adaptations that help plants conserve water, while in this chapter we are concerned with metabolic adaptations. The solutions often involve trade-offs. An important example is the compromise between photosynthesis and the prevention of excessive water loss from the plant. The CO<sub>2</sub> required for photosynthesis enters a leaf via stomata, the pores on the leaf surface (see Figure 10.4). However, stomata are also the main avenues of transpiration, the evaporative loss of water from leaves. On a hot, dry day, most plants close their stomata, a response that conserves water. This response also reduces photosynthetic yield by limiting access to CO<sub>2</sub>. With stomata even partially closed, CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations begin to decrease in the air spaces within the leaf, and the concentration of O<sub>2</sub> released from the light reactions begins to increase. These conditions within the leaf favor an apparently wasteful process called photorespiration.

#### Photorespiration: An Evolutionary Relic?

In most plants, initial fixation of carbon occurs via rubisco, the Calvin cycle enzyme that adds CO<sub>2</sub> to ribulose biphosphate. Such plants are called **C<sub>3</sub> plants** because the first organic product of carbon fixation is a three-carbon compound,



3-phosphoglycerate (see Figure 10.19). Rice, wheat, and soybeans are  $C_3$  plants that are important in agriculture. When their stomata partially close on hot, dry days,  $C_3$  plants produce less sugar because the declining level of  $CO_2$  in the leaf starves the Calvin cycle. In addition, rubisco can bind  $O_2$  in place of  $CO_2$ . As  $CO_2$  becomes scarce within the air spaces of the leaf, rubisco adds  $O_2$  to the Calvin cycle instead of  $CO_2$ . The product splits, and a two-carbon compound leaves the chloroplast. Peroxisomes and mitochondria rearrange and split this compound, releasing  $CO_2$ . The process is called **photorespiration** because it occurs in the light (*photo*) and consumes  $O_2$  while producing  $CO_2$  (*respiration*). However, unlike normal cellular respiration, photorespiration generates no ATP; in fact, photorespiration consumes ATP. And unlike photosynthesis, photorespiration produces no sugar. In fact, photorespiration *decreases* photosynthetic output by siphoning organic material from the Calvin cycle and releasing  $CO_2$  that would otherwise be fixed.

How can we explain the existence of a metabolic process that seems to be counterproductive for the plant? According to one hypothesis, photorespiration is evolutionary baggage—a metabolic relic from a much earlier time when the atmosphere had less  $O_2$  and more  $CO_2$  than it does today. In the ancient atmosphere that prevailed when rubisco first evolved, the inability of the enzyme's active site to exclude  $O_2$  would have made little difference. The hypothesis suggests that modern rubisco retains some of its chance affinity for  $O_2$ , which is now so concentrated in the atmosphere that a certain amount of photorespiration is inevitable.

We now know that, at least in some cases, photorespiration plays a protective role in plants. Plants that are impaired in their ability to carry out photorespiration (due to defective genes) are more susceptible to damage induced by excess light. Researchers consider this clear evidence that photorespiration acts to neutralize the otherwise damaging products of the light reactions, which build up when a low  $CO_2$  concentration limits the progress of the Calvin cycle. Whether there are other benefits of photorespiration is still unknown. In many types of plants—including a significant number of crop plants—photorespiration drains away as much as 50% of the carbon fixed by the Calvin cycle. As heterotrophs that depend on carbon fixation in chloroplasts for our food, we naturally view photorespiration as wasteful. Indeed, if photorespiration could be reduced in certain plant species without otherwise affecting photosynthetic productivity, crop yields and food supplies might increase.

In some plant species, alternate modes of carbon fixation have evolved that minimize photorespiration and optimize the Calvin cycle—even in hot, arid climates. The two most important of these photosynthetic adaptations are  $C_4$  photosynthesis and crassulacean acid metabolism (CAM).

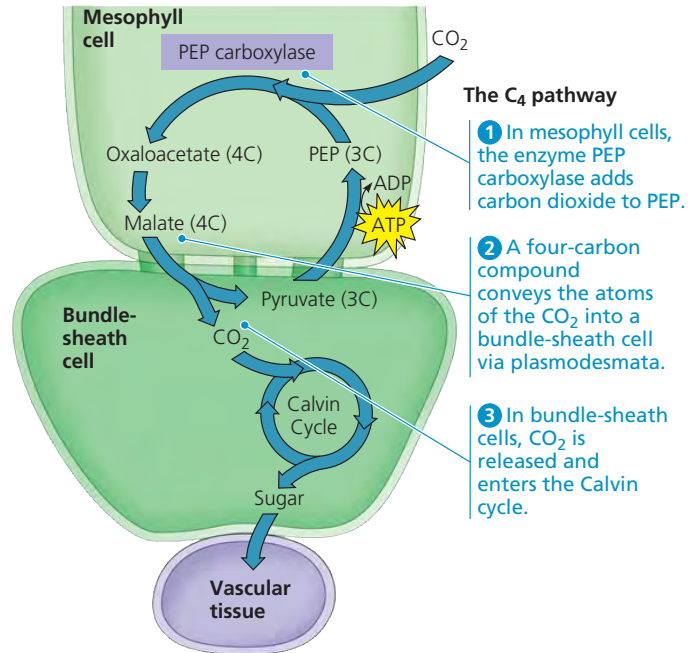
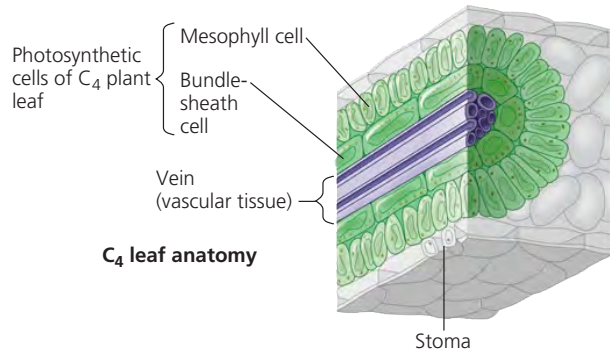
## $C_4$ Plants

The  **$C_4$  plants** are so named because they preface the Calvin cycle with an alternate mode of carbon fixation that forms a four-carbon compound as its first product. Several thousand species in at least 19 plant families use the  $C_4$  pathway. Among the  $C_4$  plants important to agriculture are sugarcane and corn, members of the grass family.

A unique leaf anatomy is correlated with the mechanism of  $C_4$  photosynthesis (Figure 10.20; compare with Figure 10.4). In  $C_4$  plants, there are two distinct types of photosynthetic cells: bundle-sheath cells and mesophyll cells. **Bundle-sheath cells** are arranged into tightly packed sheaths around the veins of the leaf. Between the bundle sheath and the leaf surface are the more loosely arranged mesophyll cells. The Calvin cycle is confined to the chloroplasts of the bundle-sheath cells. However, the Calvin cycle is preceded by incorporation of  $CO_2$  into organic compounds in the mesophyll cells. See the numbered steps in Figure 10.20, which are also described here:

- 1 The first step is carried out by an enzyme present only in mesophyll cells called **PEP carboxylase**. This enzyme adds  $CO_2$  to phosphoenolpyruvate (PEP), forming the four-carbon product oxaloacetate. PEP carboxylase has a much higher affinity for  $CO_2$  than does rubisco and no affinity for  $O_2$ . Therefore, PEP carboxylase can fix carbon efficiently when rubisco cannot—that is, when it is hot and dry and stomata are partially closed, causing  $CO_2$  concentration in the leaf to fall and  $O_2$  concentration to rise.
- 2 After the  $C_4$  plant fixes carbon from  $CO_2$ , the mesophyll cells export their four-carbon products (malate in the example shown in Figure 10.20) to bundle-sheath cells through plasmodesmata (see Figure 6.31).
- 3 Within the bundle-sheath cells, the four-carbon compounds release  $CO_2$ , which is reassimilated into organic material by rubisco and the Calvin cycle. The same reaction regenerates pyruvate, which is transported to mesophyll cells. There, ATP is used to convert pyruvate to PEP, allowing the reaction cycle to continue; this ATP can be thought of as the “price” of concentrating  $CO_2$  in the bundle-sheath cells. To generate this extra ATP, bundle-sheath cells carry out cyclic electron flow, the process described earlier in this chapter (see Figure 10.16). In fact, these cells contain PS I but no PS II, so cyclic electron flow is their only photosynthetic mode of generating ATP.

In effect, the mesophyll cells of a  $C_4$  plant pump  $CO_2$  into the bundle sheath, keeping the  $CO_2$  concentration in the bundle-sheath cells high enough for rubisco to bind carbon



**▲ Figure 10.20  $C_4$  leaf anatomy and the  $C_4$  pathway.** The structure and biochemical functions of the leaves of  $C_4$  plants are an evolutionary adaptation to hot, dry climates. This adaptation maintains a  $CO_2$  concentration in the bundle sheath that favors photosynthesis over photorespiration.

dioxide rather than oxygen. The cyclic series of reactions involving PEP carboxylase and the regeneration of PEP can be thought of as a  $CO_2$ -concentrating pump that is powered by ATP. In this way,  $C_4$  photosynthesis minimizes photorespiration and enhances sugar production. This adaptation is especially advantageous in hot regions with intense sunlight, where stomata partially close during the day, and it is in such environments that  $C_4$  plants evolved and thrive today.

Since the Industrial Revolution began in the 1800s, human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels have drastically increased the concentration of  $CO_2$  in the atmosphere. The resulting global climate change, including an increase in average temperatures around the planet, may have far-reaching effects on plant species. Scientists are concerned that increasing  $CO_2$  concentration and temperature may affect  $C_3$  and  $C_4$  plants differently, thus changing the relative abundance of these species in a given plant community.

Which type of plant would stand to gain more from increasing  $CO_2$  levels? Recall that in  $C_3$  plants, the binding of  $O_2$  rather than  $CO_2$  by rubisco leads to photorespiration, lowering the efficiency of photosynthesis.  $C_4$  plants overcome this problem by concentrating  $CO_2$  in the bundle-sheath cells

at the cost of ATP. Rising  $CO_2$  levels should benefit  $C_3$  plants by lowering the amount of photorespiration that occurs. At the same time, rising temperatures have the opposite effect, increasing photorespiration. (Other factors such as water availability may also come into play.) In contrast, many  $C_4$  plants could be largely unaffected by increasing  $CO_2$  levels or temperature. In different regions, the particular combination of these two factors is likely to alter the balance of  $C_3$  and  $C_4$  plants in varying ways. The effects of such a widespread and variable change in community structure are unpredictable and thus a cause of legitimate concern.

## CAM Plants

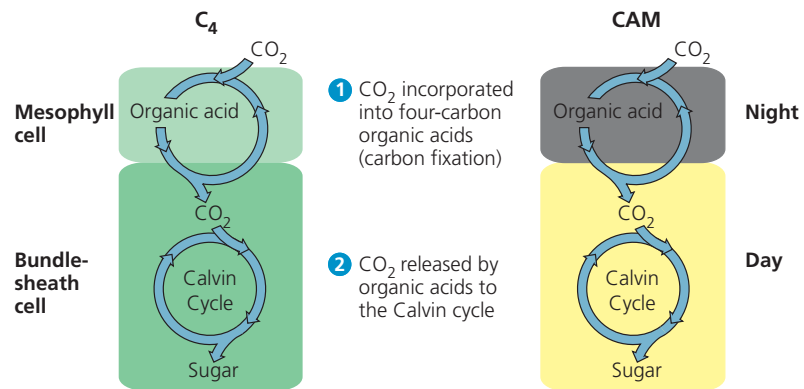
A second photosynthetic adaptation to arid conditions has evolved in many succulent (water-storing) plants, numerous cacti, pineapples, and representatives of several other plant families. These plants open their stomata during the night and close them during the day, just the reverse of how other plants behave. Closing stomata during the day helps desert plants conserve water, but it also prevents  $CO_2$  from entering the leaves. During the night, when their stomata are open, these plants take up  $CO_2$  and incorporate it into a variety

► **Figure 10.21 C<sub>4</sub> and CAM photosynthesis compared.** Both adaptations are characterized by ① preliminary incorporation of CO<sub>2</sub> into organic acids, followed by ② transfer of CO<sub>2</sub> to the Calvin cycle. The C<sub>4</sub> and CAM pathways are two evolutionary solutions to the problem of maintaining photosynthesis with stomata partially or completely closed on hot, dry days.



Sugarcane

Pineapple



**(a) Spatial separation of steps.**  
In C<sub>4</sub> plants, carbon fixation and the Calvin cycle occur in different types of cells.

**(b) Temporal separation of steps.**  
In CAM plants, carbon fixation and the Calvin cycle occur in the same cells at different times.

of organic acids. This mode of carbon fixation is called **crassulacean acid metabolism**, or **CAM**, after the plant family Crassulaceae, the succulents in which the process was first discovered. The mesophyll cells of **CAM plants** store the organic acids they make during the night in their vacuoles until morning, when the stomata close. During the day, when the light reactions can supply ATP and NADPH for the Calvin cycle, CO<sub>2</sub> is released from the organic acids made the night before to become incorporated into sugar in the chloroplasts.

Notice in **Figure 10.21** that the CAM pathway is similar to the C<sub>4</sub> pathway in that carbon dioxide is first incorporated into organic intermediates before it enters the Calvin cycle. The difference is that in C<sub>4</sub> plants, the initial steps of carbon fixation are separated structurally from the Calvin cycle, whereas in CAM plants, the two steps occur at separate times but within the same cell. (Keep in mind that CAM, C<sub>4</sub>, and C<sub>3</sub> plants all eventually use the Calvin cycle to make sugar from carbon dioxide.)

## CONCEPT CHECK 10.4

1. Explain why photorespiration lowers photosynthetic output for plants.
2. The presence of only PS I, not PS II, in the bundle-sheath cells of C<sub>4</sub> plants has an effect on O<sub>2</sub> concentration. What is that effect, and how might that benefit the plant?
3. **MAKE CONNECTIONS** Refer to the discussion of ocean acidification in Concept 3.3 (p. 55). Ocean acidification and changes in the distribution of C<sub>3</sub> and C<sub>4</sub> plants may seem to be two very different problems, but what do they have in common? Explain.
4. **WHAT IF?** How would you expect the relative abundance of C<sub>3</sub> versus C<sub>4</sub> and CAM species to change in a geographic region whose climate becomes much hotter and drier, with no change in CO<sub>2</sub> concentration?

For suggested answers, see Appendix A.

## The Importance of Photosynthesis: A Review

In this chapter, we have followed photosynthesis from photons to food. The light reactions capture solar energy and use it to make ATP and transfer electrons from water to  $\text{NADP}^+$ , forming NADPH. The Calvin cycle uses the ATP and NADPH to produce sugar from carbon dioxide. The energy that enters the chloroplasts as sunlight becomes stored as chemical energy in organic compounds. See **Figure 10.22** for a review of the entire process.

What are the fates of photosynthetic products? The sugar made in the chloroplasts supplies the entire plant with chemical energy and carbon skeletons for the synthesis of all the major organic molecules of plant cells. About 50% of the organic material made by photosynthesis is consumed as fuel for cellular respiration in the mitochondria of the plant cells. Sometimes there is a loss of photosynthetic products to photorespiration.

Technically, green cells are the only autotrophic parts of the plant. The rest of the plant depends on organic molecules exported from leaves via veins. In most plants, carbohydrate is transported out of the leaves in the form of sucrose, a disaccharide. After arriving at nonphotosynthetic cells, the sucrose provides raw material for cellular respiration and a multitude of anabolic pathways that synthesize proteins, lipids, and other products. A considerable amount of sugar in the form of glucose is linked together to make the polysaccharide cellulose,

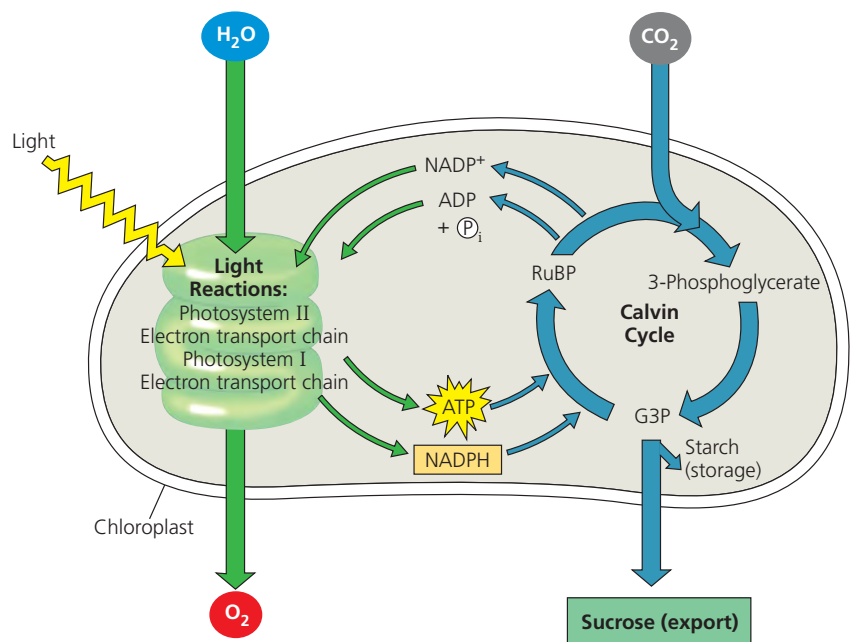
especially in plant cells that are still growing and maturing. Cellulose, the main ingredient of cell walls, is the most abundant organic molecule in the plant—and probably on the surface of the planet.

Most plants manage to make more organic material each day than they need to use as respiratory fuel and precursors for biosynthesis. They stockpile the extra sugar by synthesizing starch, storing some in the chloroplasts themselves and some in storage cells of roots, tubers, seeds, and fruits. In accounting for the consumption of the food molecules produced by photosynthesis, let's not forget that most plants lose leaves, roots, stems, fruits, and sometimes their entire bodies to heterotrophs, including humans.

On a global scale, photosynthesis is the process responsible for the presence of oxygen in our atmosphere. Furthermore, in terms of food production, the collective productivity of the minuscule chloroplasts is prodigious: Photosynthesis makes an estimated 160 billion metric tons of carbohydrate per year (a metric ton is 1,000 kg, about 1.1 tons). That's organic matter equivalent in mass to a stack of about 60 trillion copies of this textbook—17 stacks of books reaching from Earth to the sun! No other chemical process on the planet can match the output of photosynthesis. And as we mentioned earlier, researchers are seeking ways to capitalize on photosynthetic production to produce alternative fuels. No process is more important than photosynthesis to the welfare of life on Earth.

► **Figure 10.22 A review of photosynthesis.** This diagram outlines the main reactants and products of the light reactions and the Calvin cycle as they occur in the chloroplasts of plant cells. The entire ordered operation depends on the structural integrity of the chloroplast and its membranes. Enzymes in the chloroplast and cytosol convert glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate (G3P), the direct product of the Calvin cycle, to many other organic compounds.

**MAKE CONNECTIONS** Return to the micrograph in *Figure 5.6a*, on page 72. Label and describe where the light reactions and the Calvin cycle take place. Also explain where the starch granules in the micrograph came from.



### Light Reactions:

- Are carried out by molecules in the thylakoid membranes
- Convert light energy to the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH
- Split  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and release  $\text{O}_2$  to the atmosphere

### Calvin Cycle Reactions:

- Take place in the stroma
- Use ATP and NADPH to convert  $\text{CO}_2$  to the sugar G3P
- Return ADP, inorganic phosphate, and  $\text{NADP}^+$  to the light reactions

# 10 CHAPTER REVIEW

## SUMMARY OF KEY CONCEPTS

### CONCEPT 10.1

**Photosynthesis converts light energy to the chemical energy of food (pp. 186–189)**

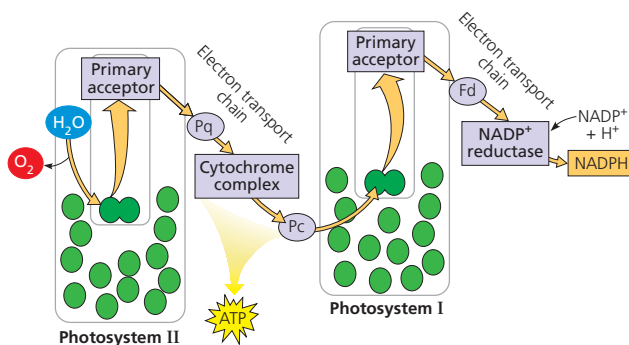
- In **autotrophic** eukaryotes, photosynthesis occurs in **chloroplasts**, organelles containing **thylakoids**. Stacks of thylakoids form grana. **Photosynthesis** is summarized as  $6 \text{ CO}_2 + 12 \text{ H}_2\text{O} + \text{Light energy} \rightarrow \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6 \text{ O}_2 + 6 \text{ H}_2\text{O}$ . Chloroplasts split water into hydrogen and oxygen, incorporating the electrons of hydrogen into sugar molecules. Photosynthesis is a redox process:  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is oxidized, and  $\text{CO}_2$  is reduced. The **light reactions** in the thylakoid membranes split water, releasing  $\text{O}_2$ , producing ATP, and forming **NADPH**. The **Calvin cycle** in the **stroma** forms sugar from  $\text{CO}_2$ , using ATP for energy and NADPH for reducing power.

**?** Compare and describe the roles of  $\text{CO}_2$  and  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  in respiration and photosynthesis.

### CONCEPT 10.2

**The light reactions convert solar energy to the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH (pp. 189–197)**

- Light is a form of electromagnetic energy. The colors we see as **visible light** include those **wavelengths** that drive photosynthesis. A pigment absorbs light of specific wavelengths; **chlorophyll a** is the main photosynthetic pigment in plants. Other accessory pigments absorb different wavelengths of light and pass the energy on to chlorophyll a.
- A pigment goes from a ground state to an excited state when a **photon** of light boosts one of the pigment's electrons to a higher-energy orbital. This excited state is unstable. Electrons from isolated pigments tend to fall back to the ground state, giving off heat and/or light.
- A **photosystem** is composed of a **reaction-center complex** surrounded by **light-harvesting complexes** that funnel the energy of photons to the reaction-center complex. When a special pair of reaction-center chlorophyll a molecules absorbs energy, one of its electrons is boosted to a higher energy level and transferred to the **primary electron acceptor**. **Photosystem II** contains P680 chlorophyll a molecules in the reaction-center complex; **photosystem I** contains P700 molecules.
- Linear electron flow** during the light reactions uses both photosystems and produces NADPH, ATP, and oxygen:



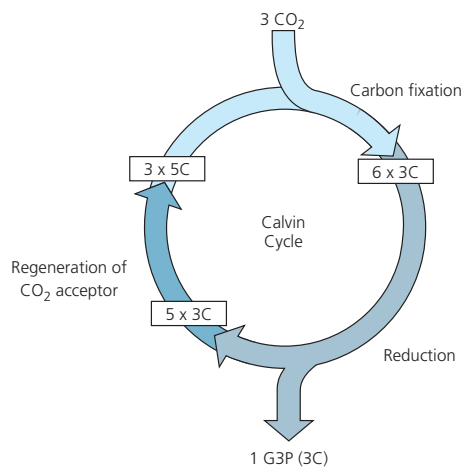
- Cyclic electron flow** employs only photosystem I, producing ATP but no NADPH or  $\text{O}_2$ .
- During chemiosmosis in both mitochondria and chloroplasts, electron transport chains generate an  $\text{H}^+$  gradient across a membrane. ATP synthase uses this proton-motive force to make ATP.

**?** The absorption spectrum of chlorophyll a differs from the action spectrum of photosynthesis. Explain this observation.

### CONCEPT 10.3

**The Calvin cycle uses the chemical energy of ATP and NADPH to reduce  $\text{CO}_2$  to sugar (pp. 198–199)**

- The Calvin cycle occurs in the stroma, using electrons from NADPH and energy from ATP. One molecule of **G3P** exits the cycle per three  $\text{CO}_2$  molecules fixed and is converted to glucose and other organic molecules.



**DRAW IT** On the diagram above, draw where ATP and NADPH are used and where rubisco functions. Describe these steps.

### CONCEPT 10.4

**Alternative mechanisms of carbon fixation have evolved in hot, arid climates (pp. 199–202)**

- On dry, hot days,  **$\text{C}_3$  plants** close their stomata, conserving water. Oxygen from the light reactions builds up. In **photorespiration**,  $\text{O}_2$  substitutes for  $\text{CO}_2$  in the active site of rubisco. This process consumes organic fuel and releases  $\text{CO}_2$  without producing ATP or carbohydrate. Photorespiration may be an evolutionary relic, and it may play a photoprotective role.
- $\text{C}_4$  plants** minimize the cost of photorespiration by incorporating  $\text{CO}_2$  into four-carbon compounds in mesophyll cells. These compounds are exported to **bundle-sheath cells**, where they release carbon dioxide for use in the Calvin cycle.
- CAM plants** open their stomata at night, incorporating  $\text{CO}_2$  into organic acids, which are stored in mesophyll cells. During the day, the stomata close, and the  $\text{CO}_2$  is released from the organic acids for use in the Calvin cycle.
- Organic compounds produced by photosynthesis provide the energy and building material for ecosystems.

**?** Why are  $\text{C}_4$  and CAM photosynthesis more energetically expensive than  $\text{C}_3$  photosynthesis? What climate conditions would favor  $\text{C}_4$  and CAM plants?

## TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

### LEVEL 1: KNOWLEDGE/COMPREHENSION

- The light reactions of photosynthesis supply the Calvin cycle with
  - light energy.
  - CO<sub>2</sub> and ATP.
  - H<sub>2</sub>O and NADPH.
  - ATP and NADPH.
  - sugar and O<sub>2</sub>.
- Which of the following sequences correctly represents the flow of electrons during photosynthesis?
  - NADPH → O<sub>2</sub> → CO<sub>2</sub>
  - H<sub>2</sub>O → NADPH → Calvin cycle
  - NADPH → chlorophyll → Calvin cycle
  - H<sub>2</sub>O → photosystem I → photosystem II
  - NADPH → electron transport chain → O<sub>2</sub>
- How is photosynthesis similar in C<sub>4</sub> plants and CAM plants?
  - In both cases, only photosystem I is used.
  - Both types of plants make sugar without the Calvin cycle.
  - In both cases, rubisco is not used to fix carbon initially.
  - Both types of plants make most of their sugar in the dark.
  - In both cases, thylakoids are not involved in photosynthesis.
- Which of the following statements is a correct distinction between autotrophs and heterotrophs?
  - Only heterotrophs require chemical compounds from the environment.
  - Cellular respiration is unique to heterotrophs.
  - Only heterotrophs have mitochondria.
  - Autotrophs, but not heterotrophs, can nourish themselves beginning with CO<sub>2</sub> and other nutrients that are inorganic.
  - Only heterotrophs require oxygen.
- Which of the following does *not* occur during the Calvin cycle?
  - carbon fixation
  - oxidation of NADPH
  - release of oxygen
  - regeneration of the CO<sub>2</sub> acceptor
  - consumption of ATP

### LEVEL 2: APPLICATION/ANALYSIS

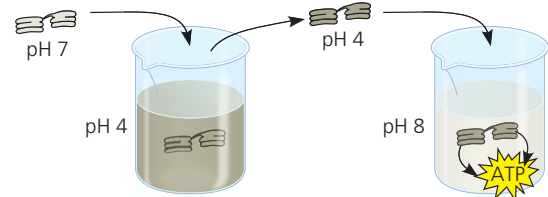
- In mechanism, photophosphorylation is most similar to
  - substrate-level phosphorylation in glycolysis.
  - oxidative phosphorylation in cellular respiration.
  - the Calvin cycle.
  - carbon fixation.
  - reduction of NADP<sup>+</sup>.
- Which process is most directly driven by light energy?
  - creation of a pH gradient by pumping protons across the thylakoid membrane
  - carbon fixation in the stroma
  - reduction of NADP<sup>+</sup> molecules
  - removal of electrons from chlorophyll molecules
  - ATP synthesis

### LEVEL 3: SYNTHESIS/EVALUATION

- EVOLUTION CONNECTION**  
Photorespiration can decrease soybeans' photosynthetic output by about 50%. Would you expect this figure to be higher or lower in wild relatives of soybeans? Why?

### 9. SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY

**MAKE CONNECTIONS** **DRAW IT** The following diagram represents an experiment with isolated thylakoids. The thylakoids were first made acidic by soaking them in a solution at pH 4. After the thylakoid space reached pH 4, the thylakoids were transferred to a basic solution at pH 8. The thylakoids then made ATP in the dark. (See Concept 3.3, pp. 53–54, to review pH).



Draw an enlargement of part of the thylakoid membrane in the beaker with the solution at pH 8. Draw ATP synthase. Label the areas of high H<sup>+</sup> concentration and low H<sup>+</sup> concentration. Show the direction protons flow through the enzyme, and show the reaction where ATP is synthesized. Would ATP end up in the thylakoid or outside of it? Explain why the thylakoids in the experiment were able to make ATP in the dark.

### 10. SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY

Scientific evidence indicates that the CO<sub>2</sub> added to the air by the burning of wood and fossil fuels is contributing to global warming, a rise in global temperature. Tropical rain forests are estimated to be responsible for approximately 20% of global photosynthesis, yet the consumption of large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> by living trees is thought to make little or no *net* contribution to reduction of global warming. Why might this be? (*Hint*: What processes in both living and dead trees produce CO<sub>2</sub>?)

### 11. WRITE ABOUT A THEME

**Energy Transfer** Life is solar powered. Almost all the producers of the biosphere depend on energy from the sun to produce the organic molecules that supply the energy and carbon skeletons needed for life. In a short essay (100–150 words), describe how the process of photosynthesis in the chloroplasts of plants transforms the energy of sunlight into the chemical energy of sugar molecules.

For selected answers, see Appendix A.

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**Questions** Student Misconceptions • Reading Quiz • Multiple Choice • End-of-Chapter

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