

FLOWERING NEWSLETTER REVIEW

Time to flower: interplay between photoperiod and the circadian clock

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Received 21 August 2014; Revised 6 October 2014; Accepted 6 October 2014

Abstract

Plants precisely time the onset of flowering to ensure reproductive success. A major factor in seasonal control of flowering time is the photoperiod. The length of the daily light period is measured by the circadian clock in leaves, and a signal is conveyed to the shoot apex to initiate floral transition accordingly. In the last two decades, the molecular players in the photoperiodic pathway have been identified in *Arabidopsis thaliana*. Moreover, the intricate connections between the circadian clockwork and components of the photoperiodic pathway have been unravelled. In particular, the molecular basis of time-of-day-dependent sensitivity to floral stimuli, as predicted by Bünning and Pittendrigh, has been elucidated. This review covers recent insights into the molecular mechanisms underlying clock regulation of photoperiodic responses and the integration of the photoperiodic pathway into the flowering time network in *Arabidopsis*. Furthermore, examples of conservation and divergence in photoperiodic flower induction in other plant species are discussed.

Key words: *Arabidopsis*, circadian clock, CO, flowering, FT, photoperiod.

Introduction

Plants carefully time the onset of flowering to the appropriate season of the year to ensure reproductive success. Premature flowering limits vegetative growth and thus the accumulation of sufficient resources, while flowering too late puts the developing seeds at risk of harmful environmental conditions in the autumn, such as frost. A major determinant of floral transition is the relative duration of light and dark, as the change of daylength over the year is a reliable indicator of seasonal progression (Srikanth and Schmid, 2011; Andres and Coupland, 2012). Plants keep track of daylength, the photoperiod, with the help of an endogenous timekeeper. This clock synchronizes physiological and molecular processes to the day–night cycle, enabling plants to anticipate upcoming conditions (Green *et al.*, 2002; Dodd *et al.*, 2005). The endogenous clock has for some time been implicated in photoperiodic flowering time control (Bünning, 1936). It was also known that the photoperiod is perceived in the leaves and thus a signal has to travel to the shoot apex to initiate flowering. This led to the concept of ‘florigen’—hormone-like substances transmitting

the command to flower within the plant (Chailakhyan, 1936). Additionally, the idea of graft-transmissible floral repressors, ‘antiflorigens’, was put forward (Lang and Melchers, 1943).

Elucidation of the molecular events underlying photoperiodic time measurement and relaying this information to the site of flower initiation gained momentum with *Arabidopsis thaliana* emerging as a model organism for flowering time control (Redei, 1962; Koornneef *et al.*, 1991). Twenty years ago, the central player of the photoperiodic pathway was cloned from the *constans* mutant that flowers irrespective of daylength (Putterill *et al.*, 1995). Around the same time, the first clock components were cloned, providing an entry to dissect the connection between circadian timing and photoperiodic response (Schaffer *et al.*, 1998; Wang and Tobin, 1998; Fowler *et al.*, 1999). Identification of an ever-increasing array of clock components and insights into their molecular properties progressed in parallel with in-depth characterization of flowering time mutants and targeted biochemical and cell biology approaches to unravel molecular players of the

external and internal coincidence mechanism and resolve the identity of florigens and antiflorigens. In addition, mathematical modelling predicted new interactions within the photoperiodic pathway that were confirmed experimentally (Salazar *et al.*, 2009). The importance of the circadian clock in flowering time control was further emphasized by a field study combining genome-wide association and quantitative trait loci mapping, where clock-related genes, not previously connected to flowering in greenhouse conditions, were identified (Brachi *et al.*, 2010).

Here we review recent insights into the molecular mechanisms underlying clock regulation of photoperiodic responses and the integration of the photoperiodic pathway into the flowering time network in *Arabidopsis*. Furthermore, we point out emerging conservation and divergence in photoperiodic flower induction in plant species where the information is less comprehensive.

The circadian timing system in *Arabidopsis thaliana*

The core clockwork of the ‘circadian’ (meaning about a day) timing system operates at the level of single cells. It comprises molecular feedback loops through which clock proteins generate their own 24h rhythm. The blueprint of the *Arabidopsis* clock serves as a reference for clocks in other plants (McClung, 2013; Staiger *et al.*, 2013). Of note is that while the principle of timekeeping is conserved in eukaryotes, the molecular components of plant clocks are distinctly different from those of mammals and insects, which share a high degree of homology (Young and Kay, 2001).

Initially, the core clock in *Arabidopsis* was viewed as a series of feedback circuits through which clock components

reciprocally or sequentially repress each other. Two related Myb transcription factors LATE ELONGATED HYPOCOTYL (LHY) and CIRCADIAN CLOCK ASSOCIATED 1 (CCA1) whose expression peaks at dawn repress *TIMING OF CAB EXPRESSION 1 (TOC1)/PSEUDO-RESPONSE REGULATOR 1 (PRR1)*, peaking at dusk (Schaffer *et al.*, 1998; Wang and Tobin, 1998; Alabadi *et al.*, 2001) (Fig. 1). Inhibition of *TOC1* transcription by CCA1 and LHY additionally involves a co-repressor complex of CONSTITUTIVE PHOTOMORPHOGENIC10 (COP10), DE-ETIOLATED1, and DDB1 (Lau *et al.*, 2011). *TOC1/PRR1* is the founding member of a family of PRRs that peak in a serial manner over the day, starting with *PRR9* in the morning, followed by *PRR7*, *PRR5*, and then *TOC1* peaking around dusk (Matsushika *et al.*, 2000). The PRRs including *TOC1* sequentially repress *CCA1* and *LHY* in the course of the day (Nakamichi *et al.*, 2010; Gendron *et al.*, 2012; Huang *et al.*, 2012; Carre and Veflingstad, 2013). Recently it was found that *CCA1* and *LHY* repression by *PRR9*, *PRR7*, and *PRR5* relies on co-repressors of the TOPLESS/TOPLESS-RELATED (TPR) family (Wang *et al.*, 2013).

Another important regulatory element is the evening complex (EC) comprising *EARLY FLOWERING 3 (ELF3)*, *ELF4*, and the DNA-binding factor *LUX ARRHYTHMO (LUX)*, all peaking at the end of the day (Dixon *et al.*, 2011; Herrero *et al.*, 2012; Nusinow *et al.*, 2011). The EC is under negative control by CCA1 and LHY (Lu *et al.*, 2012). The EC in turn represses *PRR9*, *PRR7*, *PRR5*, and *TOC1*, and as a consequence repression of *LHY* and *CCA1* is alleviated.

Post-translational processes contribute to adjust the period of clock protein oscillations to 24h (Schöning and Staiger, 2005; Mas, 2008). ZEITLUPE (ZTL), an F-box protein subunit of an SCF ubiquitin ligase complex with a light-regulated LOV (LIGHT, OXYGEN, VOLTAGE) protein interaction

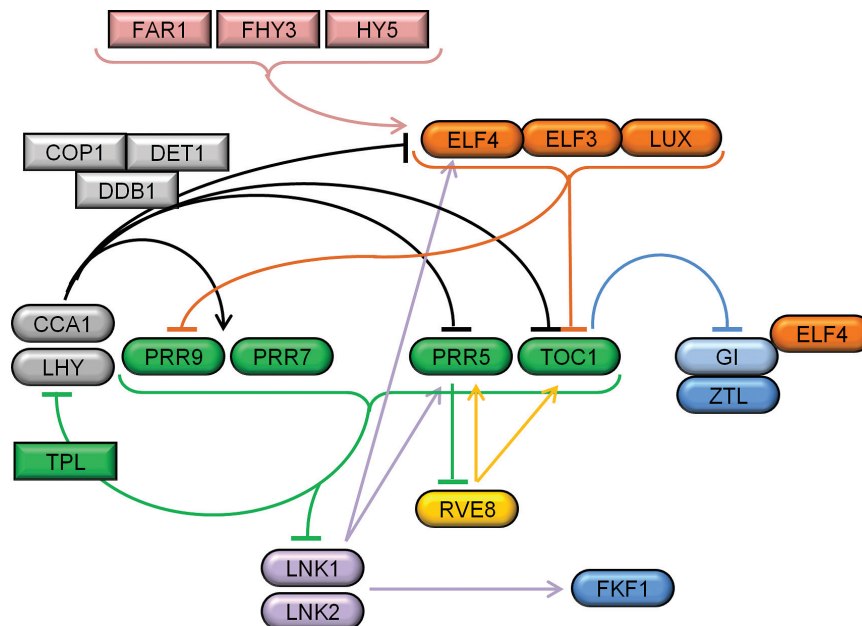


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the *Arabidopsis* circadian clockwork. The interaction of clock components (ovals) is shown. Rectangles represent accessory factors; arrows indicate activation; arrows with blunt ends represent repression; adjoining ovals/rectangles indicate protein interaction. See text for details. (This figure is available in colour at *JXB* online.)

domain, interacts with the clock protein GIGANTEA (GI). During the day, blue light enhances the interaction with GI so that ZTL is stabilized at specific times of the day, resulting in ZTL protein oscillations (Kim *et al.*, 2007; J. Kim *et al.*, 2013). ZTL also interacts with PRR5 and TOC1 to target them for proteosomal degradation in the cytoplasm (Mas *et al.*, 2003). Interaction between PRR5 and TOC1 enhances TOC1 accumulation in the nucleus and thus shields TOC1 from degradation (Wang *et al.*, 2010).

While the components of these clock feedback loops all interact by reciprocal or sequential repression, positive elements have been unveiled more recently. FAR-RED ELONGATED HYPOCOTYL3 (FHY3), FAR-RED IMPAIRED RESPONSE1 (FAR1), and HY5 activate *ELF4* during the day (Li *et al.*, 2011), and CCA1 and LHY repress *ELF4* at dawn through direct interaction with these activators. The REVEILLE (RVE) family with homologues of CCA1 and LHY comprises members that positively regulate clock gene expression (Farinas and Mas, 2011). RVE8 promotes *PRR5* and *TOC1* expression. PRR5 in turn binds to the *RVE8* promoter and presumably represses *RVE8*, thus giving rise to yet another feedback loop (Rawat *et al.*, 2011; Hsu *et al.*, 2013).

LIGHT-REGULATED WD1 (LWD1) and (LWD2) are activators of *PRR9*, *PRR7*, and *PRR5* (Wang *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the morning-phased and red light-activated NIGHT LIGHT-INDUCIBLE AND CLOCK-REGULATED1 (LNK1) and LNK2 promote expression of a subset of early evening genes, among them *ELF4* and *PRR5*, while they are directly repressed by PRRs, creating another negative feedback loop (Rugnone *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, they interact with CCA1, LHY, RVE4, and RVE8, acting as co-activators of *PRR5* and *ELF4* transcription (Xie *et al.*, 2014). In addition, LNK1 and LNK2 activate FLAVIN BINDING, KELCH REPEAT, F-BOX1 (FKF1), an important regulator of photoperiodic flowering. Overall, the increasing number of reciprocal interactions suggests that the clockwork is best represented by an intricate web of connections (Fogelmark and Troein, 2014).

To attain synchrony with day and night, the clock is entrained via the red/far-red-absorbing PHYTOCHROMES (PHYA-PHYE), the blue light-absorbing CRYPTOCHROMES (CRY1 and CRY2), and the LOV domain proteins ZTL, FKF1, and LOV KELCH PROTEIN 2 (LKP2) (Devlin, 2002; Fankhauser and Staiger, 2002). Clock protein oscillations in turn control biological processes, the clock outputs, so that photosynthetic activity or growth take place at the optimal time of day for maximal performance and so that seasonal processes including photoperiodic flowering occur at the right time of the year.

Photoperiodic flowering

In many plants, the length of the light phase, the photoperiod, determines flowering time (Garner and Allard, 1920). Long-day (LD) plants including *Arabidopsis* and the crop plant *Hordeum vulgare* flower in response to increasing daylength.

Short-day (SD) plants include *Oryza sativa*, sorghum, and chrysanthemum. Erwin Bünning was the first to implicate an endogenous rhythm of alternating light-sensitive (photophile) and dark-sensitive (scotophile) phases in photoperiodic timekeeping (Bünning, 1936). This rhythm is generated by a biological clock itself entrained by the day–night cycle, and plants distinguish LDs and SDs based on whether ambient light coincides with the photophile or scotophile phase. This was further specified in the external coincidence model of an endogenous rhythm that needs to interact productively with light to trigger the photoperiodic response (Pittendrigh and Minis, 1964). It was also taken into consideration that multicellular organisms harbour populations of oscillators with defined phase relationships. According to the internal coincidence model, the photoperiodic response would then result from the interaction of two endogenous rhythms falling into phase. Thus, the function of light would be to control the phase relationship of these rhythms (Pittendrigh, 1972).

Experimental proof for the involvement of the clock in photoperiodic flowering came from mutants affected in both circadian and photoperiodic timekeeping (Hicks *et al.*, 1996; Schaffer *et al.*, 1998; Wang and Tobin, 1998; Fowler *et al.*, 1999). Subsequently it was found that the circadian clock and light signalling control the activity of CONSTANS (CO), the key component of the photoperiodic pathway, in the leaves. CO belongs to the B-Box Zinc-Finger Family (BBX), with the B-box B1 and B2 protein interaction domains at the N-terminus. The C-terminal domain can bind DNA and is known as the CCT (CO, CO-like, and TOC1) domain. CO activates transcription of *FLOWERING LOCUS T (FT)* and the more weakly expressed *TWIN SISTERS OF FT (TSF)* in leaf phloem companion cells (Samach *et al.*, 2000; Yamaguchi *et al.*, 2005). The FT protein then moves through the phloem to the shoot apical meristem (Corbesier *et al.*, 2007; Jaeger and Wigge, 2007; Mathieu *et al.*, 2007). Interaction with the bZIP transcription factors FD and FD PARALOGUE (Abe *et al.*, 2005) activates floral integrator genes including *SUPPRESSOR OF CONSTANS OVEREXPRESSION1* and *APETALAI*, entailing induction of a cascade of downstream genes, leading to flowering.

Temporal control of CO transcription

An intricate network of factors shapes CO expression at the transcriptional and post-translational level to confine *FT* transcription to LDs (Fig. 2). In non-inductive SDs, the *CO* mRNA undergoes circadian oscillations with a peak at zt8 (Zeitgeber time 8, i.e. 8 h after dawn) to zt10 (Suarez-Lopez *et al.*, 2001). The CO protein is degraded in darkness, however, and does not accumulate. *CO* transcription is repressed in the morning by the CYCLING DOF FACTOR (CDF) proteins (Fornara *et al.*, 2009). The CDF1 binding site, CTTT, is part of a 7 bp sequence CTTTACA that occurs in multiple repeats in the *CO* promoter (Imaizumi *et al.*, 2005). Natural variation in the number of these repeats caused by a 7 bp insertion/deletion polymorphism correlates with flowering time (Rosas *et al.*, 2014). CDF1 and CDF2 levels are regulated by

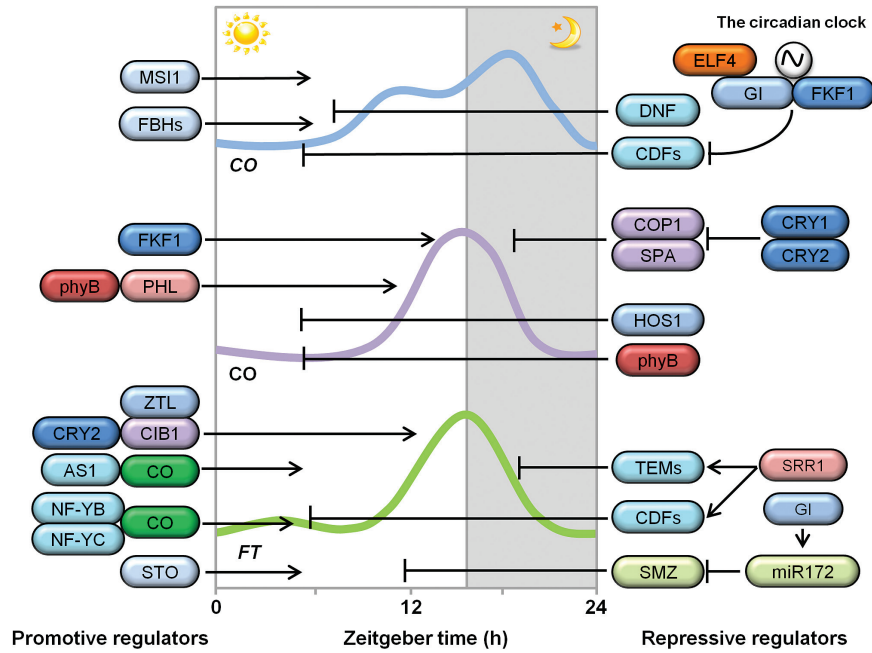


Fig. 2. Photoperiodic regulation of CO and FT in inductive LDs. The patterns of CO transcript (top), CO protein (middle), and FT transcript (bottom) during the day are displayed with promotive regulators indicated on the left and repressive regulators on the right. Activators of CO transcription include MSI1 and FBH1-4; repressors include the CDFs and DNF. Activators of CO protein accumulation include FKF1 and PHL; repressors include the COP1–SPA complex, phyB, and HOS1. Activators of FT transcription include CO, NF-YB and NF-YC, AS1, CIB1, and STO; repressors include TEM1 and TEM2, CDFs, and SMZ. The end of the arrows indicates the time of day when the factors are active. (This figure is available in colour at JXB online.)

proteolytic degradation via a light-dependent complex of the clock proteins GI and FKF1. In SDs, *GI* peaks at zt7 and *FKF1* peaks at zt10 (Fornara *et al.*, 2009). Thus, both proteins are expressed during darkness and do not interact so that the CDFs remain active (Sawa *et al.*, 2007). In LDs, the *FKF1* and *GI* rhythms become synchronized, peaking around zt13, and the proteins undergo a blue light-dependent complex formation which stabilizes FKF1 (Sawa *et al.*, 2007). The FKF1–GI complex then targets CDF1 and CDF2 to the proteasome, and the relief from repression allows *CO* expression with a peak around zt12–zt16. This allows CO protein to accumulate in the light and stimulate *FT* transcription. The light-dependent interaction of FKF1 and GI is similar to the interaction of ZTL with GI during the circadian cycle. To date, a role for ZTL in photoperiodic flowering has not been described.

Recently, additional factors have been identified that control *CO* expression. ELF4 regulates the access of GI to chromatin by sequestering GI from the nucleoplasm into subnuclear bodies preferentially during the night, thus restricting its ability to bind to the *CO* promoter (Y. Kim *et al.*, 2013). DAY NEUTRAL FLOWERING (DNF) is expressed between zt4 and zt6 in SDs and acts to repress *CO* around this time (Morris *et al.*, 2010). This occurs independently of the GI–FKF1–CDF1 module. As DNF encodes a membrane-bound E3 ligase, it may affect CO stability. The FLOWERING BHLH (basic helix–loop–helix) proteins FBH1, FBH2, FBH3, and FBH4 act as transcriptional activators of *CO* (Ito *et al.*, 2012). Binding of FBH1 to the *CO* promoter occurs throughout the day, suggesting that any timed activity would require post-translational regulation. FBH1 is also connected to the circadian clock through

binding and repression of the *CCA1* promoter (Pruneda-Paz *et al.*, 2014).

PHYTOCHROME AND FLOWERING TIME (PFT1)/MED25, a subunit of the Mediator complex that bridges transcription factors with RNA polymerase II, promotes *CO* expression and *FT* expression in a CO-independent manner (Inigo *et al.*, 2011). Recently, the function of PFT1 was shown to depend on the photoperiod and on the length of a short tandem repeat region encoding a 90 amino acid region enriched in Q (Rival *et al.*, 2014). PFT1 complemented *pft1-2* late flowering in LDs when the tandem repeat region was shorter or longer than in the wild-type protein, whereas it complemented *pft1-2* early flowering in SDs only with the authentic length of the Q-rich region. As proteasomal degradation is crucial for PFT1 function, it has been suggested that reduced degradation in SDs could convert PFT1 from an activator to a repressor.

Regulators of *CO* on the chromatin level have also been described. The histone-binding protein MULTICOPY SUPPRESSOR OF IRA 1 (MSI1) is part of chromatin-modifying complexes and is needed for efficient activation of *CO* during photoperiodic flowering induction (Steinbach and Hennig, 2014).

Regulation of CO protein

In addition to the elaborate regulation of *CO* transcription, CO protein accumulation is restricted in non-inductive conditions until light exposure acts to overcome this inhibition (Fig. 2). CO protein is targeted for proteasomal degradation by a complex of the RING motif-containing E3 ubiquitin ligase CONSTITUTIVE PHOTOMORPHOGENIC1

(CO1) and SUPPRESSOR OF PHYTOCHROME A-105 1 (SPA1) in darkness (Laubinger *et al.*, 2006; Jang *et al.*, 2008). Thus, the SPA1–CO1 complex prevents accumulation of CO in the second half of the day and throughout the night in SDs. Additionally, phyB activated by red light targets CO for degradation via an unknown ubiquitin ligase in the morning, and another RING finger E3 ligase, HIGH EXPRESSION OF OSMOTICALLY RESPONSIVE GENE1 (HOS1), binds to CO to destabilize it (Valverde *et al.*, 2004; Lazaro *et al.*, 2012).

In LDs, photoactivated CRYs reduce the activity of the CO1–SPA1 complex. CRY1 binds to the SPA1 C-terminus to prevent SPA1 from binding to CO1 (Lian *et al.*, 2011; Liu *et al.*, 2011), whereas CRY2 binds to the SPA1 N-terminus, promoting SPA1 binding to CO1 but repressing the SPA1–CO1 activity (Zuo *et al.*, 2011). In addition to CRY1 and CRY2, the far-red-absorbing PHYA contributes to CO stabilization (Valverde *et al.*, 2004). An interaction of CO1 with MIDGET, a regulator of a topoisomerase complex, is necessary for CO1/SPA1-controlled repression of flowering in SDs by an unknown mechanism (Schrader and Uhrig, 2013). Furthermore, FKF1 binds to CO in response to blue light, helping to stabilize CO in the afternoon (Song *et al.*, 2012b). Furthermore, PHYTOCHROME-DEPENDENT LATE-FLOWERING (PHL) accelerates flowering through red light-dependent interaction with phyB and CO, thus antagonizing the inhibitory effect of phyB on CO protein (Endo *et al.*, 2013).

Collectively, the appropriate phasing of CO relative to light and dark and the light-dependent stabilization of the CO protein in LDs show features of both the internal and the external coincidence models: synchronization of the endogenous GI and FKF1 rhythms in LDs allows degradation of CDFs in LDs to create the CO transcript pattern, and regulation of FKF1 activity by blue light through its LOV domain and of CO1/SPA1 activity through CRYs at the peak of CO oscillations allows CO protein accumulation.

The importance of an endogenous rhythm matching the environment for proper flowering has also been shown by using light–dark cycles that are longer or shorter than 24 h and alter transcript oscillations relative to dawn and dusk (Roden *et al.*, 2002). This showed that the perception of

daylength relies on adjustments of the phase angle of circadian rhythms relative to the light–dark cycle.

Co-ordination of FT transcription

A number of proteins collectively ensure expression of FT at the right time of the day (Fig. 3). An upstream region of 5.7 kb is required to drive sufficient FT expression to complement the *ft-10* late flowering mutant (Adrian *et al.*, 2010). CO binds to two so-called CO-responsive elements (COREs) in the promoter-proximal part via its CCT domain and activates FT transcription, presumably via a glutamic acid-rich region (Tiwari *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, CCAAT boxes at around –5.3 kb that are binding sites for trimeric NUCLEAR FACTOR Y (NF-Y) complexes enhance CO-mediated FT activation (Tiwari *et al.*, 2010). This effect is due to interaction of CO with the NF-YB and NF-YC subunits (Wenkel *et al.*, 2006; Cai *et al.*, 2007; Kumimoto *et al.*, 2008). Long-distance chromatin loops have been detected at the FT promoter that bring the distal enhancer elements close to the proximal promoter bound by CO (Cao *et al.*, 2014). These loops are preferentially formed at the end of the light period when CO activity and FT transcription peak. NF-Y complexes assembled at the distal CCAAT boxes thus may play a role in recruiting CO to the COREs.

The CDF proteins which are crucial repressors of CO also bind to the FT promoter to repress it in the morning (Song *et al.*, 2012b). Furthermore, FKF1 and GI also bind directly to the FT promoter (Sawa and Kay, 2011), and FKF1 may remove CDF1 to promote FT expression (Song *et al.*, 2012b). Thus, transcriptional timing of CO and of FT shares the same logic. Additionally, CRYPTOCHROME-INTERACTING BASIC-HELIX–LOOP–HELIX1 (CIB1) is activated by interaction with CRY2 and induces FT expression at the end of the day (Liu *et al.*, 2008). Thus, in addition to an indirect influence on FT activation via entrainment of the circadian clock and via blue light-dependent stabilization of GI and FKF1, CRY2 also directly regulates FT. Notably, two other blue light receptors, ZTL and LKP2, counteract proteosomal degradation of CIB1 in the absence of blue light (Liu *et al.*, 2013) (Fig. 4).

Furthermore, several factors have been identified that regulate FT chromatin. At the end of LDs, CO enables the

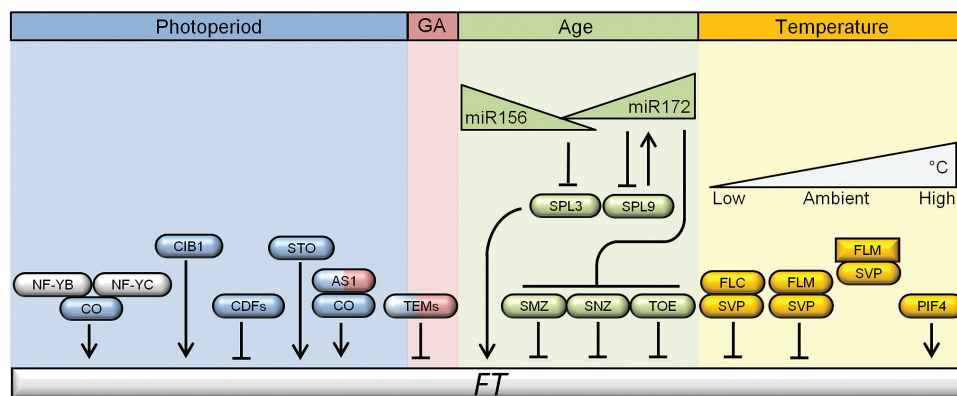


Fig. 3. Internal and exogenous cues converging on FT. Factors responding to photoperiod, gibberellin level, age, and temperature, respectively, that modulate FT transcription in the leaves are indicated. (This figure is available in colour at JXB online.)

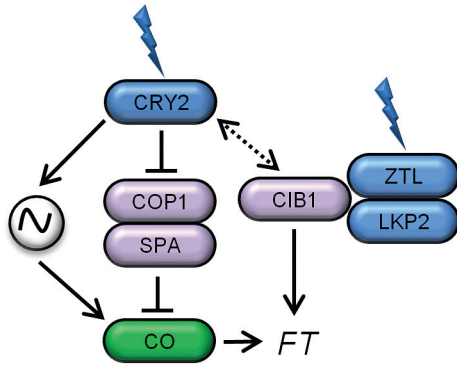


Fig. 4. Three modes of action of CRY2 in photoperiodic flower induction. CRY2 entrains the circadian clock that in turn mediates *CO* oscillations. CRY2 interacts with CIB1 to regulate *FT* transcription. CRY2 inhibits the activity of the COP1–SPA1 complex to prevent *CO* degradation in LDs. Arrows indicate activation; arrows with blunt ends represent repression; the broken arrow indicates protein interaction. (This figure is available in colour at *JXB* online.)

recruitment of histone deacetylases to *FT*, resulting in down-regulation of *FT* expression (Gu *et al.*, 2013). Thus, *CO* regulation by the photoperiodic pathway not only sets in motion *FT* expression but also leads to subsequent dampening, presumably to fine-tune *FT* levels. A Polycomb group complex directly represses *FT* during the night to prevent photoperiod-independent flowering (Y. Wang *et al.*, 2014). At dusk, its binding to *FT* chromatin is disrupted by the photoperiodic pathway, enabling *FT* activation.

The TEMPRANILLO (TEM1) and TEM2 transcription factors compete with *CO* for binding to the *FT* promoter and thus antagonize *CO* activity (Castillejo and Pelaz, 2008). TEM1 and TEM2 also interact with GI, suggesting that GI contributes to *FT* regulation also via regulation of the stability of *FT* repressors (Sawa and Kay, 2011). Moreover, TEM1 and TEM2 repress *GA3OXIDASE1* (*GA3OX1*) and *GA3OX2* encoding gibberellic acid (GA) biosynthetic enzymes and thus also repress flowering through the GA-dependent flowering pathway (Osato *et al.*, 2012). GAs have been assigned a role in response to inductive LDs through activation of *FT* transcription in leaves and of the *SQUAMOSA PROMOTER BINDING PROTEIN LIKE* (*SPL*) genes in the shoot apical meristem (Porri *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, ASYMMETRIC LEAVES 1 (AS1) binds to the *FT* promoter and interacts with *CO* to regulate *FT* expression (Song *et al.*, 2012a). AS1 also positively regulates *GA20OXIDASE* and thus may also affect *FT* indirectly via increased GA levels and derepression of *SPL3*.

Expression of *TEM1* and *TEM2* is promoted by SENSITIVITY TO RED LIGHT REDUCED1 (SRR1) (Johansson and Staiger, 2014). SRR1, a pioneer protein, was identified based on its role in red light signalling and clock regulation (Staiger *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, its importance for flowering time control was noticed in natural conditions (Brachi *et al.*, 2010). SRR1 inhibits flowering in non-inductive conditions by promoting the expression of direct *FT* repressors, among them also *CDF1* and the major repressor of flowering, the MADS box transcription factor *FLOWERING LOCUS C* (*FLC*), and thus SRR1 influences

flowering through photoperiod-dependent and -independent pathways.

Repression by *FLC* is also alleviated by exposure to cold temperatures during winter, enabling flowering upon increasing daylength in spring. This vernalization process involves epigenetic silencing of *FLC* and has been reviewed recently (Ream *et al.*, 2012; Song *et al.*, 2013). *FLC* is also down-regulated by endogenous regulators collectively referred to as the autonomous pathway, among them the chromatin modification factors *FVE* and *FLOWERING LOCUS D*, as well as the RNA-binding proteins *FCA*, *FPA*, and *FLK* (Rataj and Simpson, 2014). *FLC* and several components of the autonomous pathway have been shown to affect the period of the clock (Edwards *et al.*, 2006; Salathia *et al.*, 2006). A glycine-rich RNA-binding protein that affects flowering time through regulating *FLC* and which is rhythmically expressed, in turn regulates circadian transcripts, pointing to cross-talk between the circadian system and the floral-promoting network beyond photoperiodic timekeeping (Streitner *et al.*, 2008, 2010; Schmal *et al.*, 2013; Löhler *et al.*, 2014). Among other members of the B-box family that have been connected to photoperiodic regulation is SALT TOLERANT (STO) or BBX24 that has B1 and B2 B-boxes but no CCT domain. It is under circadian control and activates *FT* expression by competing with *FLC* (Li *et al.*, 2014). Recently, BBX19 that also has B1 and B2 B-boxes but no CCT domain and oscillates in antiphase to *CO* has been identified as a negative regulator of flowering in LDs (C.-Q. Wang *et al.*, 2014). Physical interaction of BBX19 with *CO* leads to reduced *FT* expression, suggesting that BBX19 acts through a novel mechanism, sequestering *CO* to prevent premature *FT* activation.

As well as low temperature, ambient temperature also has a decisive role in flowering time. SHORT VEGETATIVE PHASE (SVP) represses *FT* via direct binding to the promoter. Another MADS-box protein, *FLOWERING LOCUS M*, occurs as two temperature-dependent alternative splice variants that differentially interact with SVP to repress *FT* preferentially at lower temperatures (Pose *et al.*, 2013). PHYTOCHROME-INTERACTING FACTOR 4 (PIF4) mediates early flowering at high temperatures by binding to the *FT* promoter (Kumar *et al.*, 2012). Depending on the time of day of warm temperature exposure, flowering is regulated via *FT*-dependent and *FT*-independent pathways (Thines *et al.*, 2014).

***FT* expression during development**

Among components that regulate *FT* expression during plant development are microRNAs (miRNAs). An age-dependent pathway of flower induction is defined by miRNA156 (Wang *et al.*, 2009). While early in development, during the juvenile vegetative phase, *Arabidopsis* is refractory to flowering cues, it becomes responsive during the adult vegetative phase. A high miR156 level in young plants leads to cleavage of the *SPL* transcripts. miR156 decreases with development as a result of sugars accumulating through photosynthesis (Yang *et al.*, 2013; Yu *et al.*, 2013). Declining miR156 levels then allow *SPL3* to accumulate and bind to the *FT* promoter to

activate transcription. Another miR156 target, SPL9, activates *MIR172* transcription. Thus, miR172 levels increase with age, with a concomitant decrease in its targets, the *FT* repressors SCHLAFMUEITZE, SCHNARCHZAPPEN, and TARGET OF EAT1, 2, and 3 (Mathieu *et al.*, 2009). GI also stimulates increased miR172 levels in LDs, defining a CO-independent branch of the photoperiodic pathway (Jung *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, *TEM1* levels inversely correlate with *FT* during early development, and *TEM1* represses *FT* during the juvenile phase (Sgamma *et al.*, 2014), and levels of *FLC* and *SVP* also decrease with leaf age (Li *et al.*, 2008).

FT protein function

FT and *TSF* are members of a gene family with similarity to phosphatidylethanolamine-binding proteins in mammals. A large body of work demonstrated that *FT* protein is the mobile signal conveying the output of the photoperiodic pathway in the leaf to the site of flower initiation (Turck *et al.*, 2008). While *FT* is small enough to move passively through plasmodesmata, a first regulator of *FT* trafficking has been described. *FT-INTERACTING PROTEIN1* (*FTIP1*) is an endoplasmic reticulum (ER) membrane protein that regulates *FT* transport from phloem companion cells into sieve elements, and genetic evidence suggests that *FTIP1* may also act to transport *TSF* (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Mutation of D¹⁷ and V¹⁸ impaired the ability of *FT* to induce flowering when expressed specifically in companion cells, suggesting that these residues control the interaction with a regulator of transport (Ho and Weigel, 2014).

FT shares ~60% identity with *TERMINAL FLOWER1* (*TFL1*) that represses flowering, raising the question about the difference between the antagonistic proteins. Notably, mutation of a single residue, Y⁸⁵, in *FT* to H conferred a weak *TFL1* activity, whereas the reciprocal mutation of H⁸⁸ in *TFL1* to Y conferred a weak *FT*-like activity (Hanzawa *et al.*, 2005). Subsequently, the difference between the two proteins was largely attributed to an external loop (Ahn *et al.*, 2006). Evidence for the critical role of the loop comes from *Beta vulgaris* that harbours two *FT* orthologues, *BvFT1* with repressing function and *BvFT2* with activating function. Swapping the loop domains with three amino acid differences converted *BvFT1* into an activator, whereas the converse mutations convert *BvFT2* into a repressor (Pin *et al.*, 2010).

Similarly, the obligate SD plant *Chrysanthemum seticuspe* harbours *FT*-like proteins with antagonistic functions. *CsFTL3* is activated in SDs and promotes flowering (Oda *et al.*, 2012). *Chrysanthemum seticuspe ANTI-FLORIGENIC FT* (*CsAFT*) is activated in non-inductive LDs and represses flowering (Higuchi *et al.*, 2013). The antagonism of *CsAFT* and *CsFTL3* occurs through competing for *CsFDL1*, an *FD* homologue. Importantly, *CsAFT* acts systemically and thus represents an 'antiflorigen' (Fig. 5).

Recently, the Weigel laboratory undertook a large-scale functional screen of mutagenized *FT* proteins (Ho and Weigel, 2014). Mutations that transformed *FT* into a *TFL1* mimic altered the surface charge. Whereas this did not impair interactions with *FD*, *FD PARALOGUE*,

and 14-3-3, the interaction with several *TEOSINTE BRANCHED*, *CYCLOIDEA*, *PCF* (*TCP*) transcription factors was affected. Previously, *FT* has been shown to interact with *BRANCHED1/TCP18* that represses differentiation of axillary meristems and delays flowering (Niwa *et al.*, 2013).

Based on the homology of *FT* to phosphatidylethanolamine-binding proteins, a putative phospholipid binding activity was monitored, unravelling binding of *FT* to diurnally oscillating phosphatidylcholine but not to phosphatidylethanolamine *in vitro* (Nakamura *et al.*, 2014). An increased ratio of phosphatidylcholine to phosphatidylethanolamine causes early flowering at least partially dependent on *FT* and *TSF*, providing a first hint that *FT* phospholipid binding may be relevant for its *in vivo* function.

Photoperiodic regulation in crop species

Understanding seasonal control of flowering beyond *Arabidopsis* is of major interest, as it may ultimately allow the breeding of crop varieties that cope better with changing climate conditions (Jung and Müller, 2009). Through mutant analysis and whole-genome sequencing, homologues of *Arabidopsis* photoperiodic regulators have been identified with similar but also divergent functions, and additional components absent in *Arabidopsis* contribute to photoperiodic flowering time control (Andres and Coupland, 2012).

The LD plant *Pisum sativum* has been used for some time as a model to study the control of flowering time and mobile flowering signals (Weller *et al.*, 1997). Several of the genetic loci associated with the photoperiodic response encode orthologues of *Arabidopsis* clock genes. *LATE BLOOMER1* corresponds to *GI*, *DIE NEUTRALIS* corresponds to *ELF4*, *HIGH RESPONSE TO PHOTOPERIOD* corresponds to *ELF3*, and *STERILE NODES* corresponds to *LUX* (Hecht *et al.*, 2007; Liew *et al.*, 2009, 2014; Weller *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the characterization of several *FT* family members provided evidence for a more complex scenario of flower

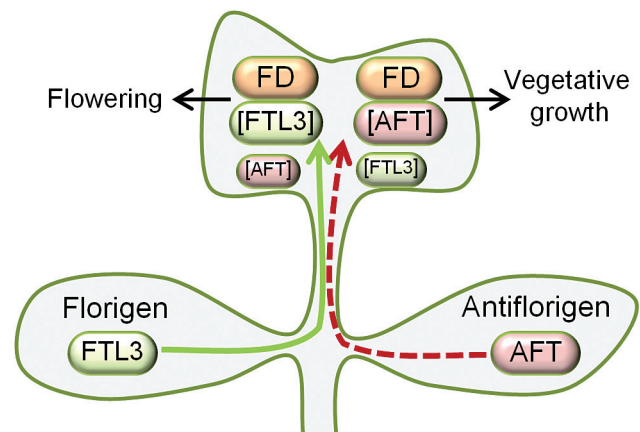


Fig. 5. Antagonistic function of *CsFTL3* with florigen activity and *CsAFT* with antiflorigen activity. *CsFTL3* is produced in leaves in inductive SDs and moves systemically to the shoot apex to interact with *CsFDL* to promote flowering. *CsAFT* is synthesized in leaves in non-inductive LDs and moves systemically to the shoot apex to compete for binding to *CsFDL* and inhibit flowering (Higuchi *et al.*, 2013). (This figure is available in colour at JXB online.)

induction in pea compared with *Arabidopsis*, relying on cross-regulation among different *FT* genes with distinct expression patterns and functions, including at least two mobile signals (Hecht *et al.*, 2011).

In the LD plant *Hordeum vulgare*, the closest orthologue of CO, HvCO1, causes up-regulation of *HvFT1* (Campoli *et al.*, 2011). However, HvCO1 promotes flowering in both SDs and LDs and thus does not mediate the response to photoperiod. Rather, photoperiodic flowering is controlled by the *PHOTOPERIOD1* (*Ppd-H1*) gene, which is homologous to the *Arabidopsis* clock gene *PRR7* (Turner *et al.*, 2005). *Ppd-H1* promotes expression of *HvFT1* independently of HvCO1 but is at the same time also regulated by HvCO. In contrast to *PRR7*, *Ppd-H1* does not have a prominent effect on clock gene expression (Campoli *et al.*, 2012).

Loss of function of the barley ELF3 homologue results in rapid flowering in both SDs and LDs (Faure *et al.*, 2012). HvELF3 is necessary to maintain photoperiodic sensitivity in spring barley through repression of *HvFT1* and production of active GAs, whereas *Arabidopsis* ELF3 has not been implicated in GA metabolism (Boden *et al.*, 2014). The HvPhyC photoreceptor has been found to promote floral transition by up-regulating *HvFT1* independently of the circadian clock and of HvCO1 (Nishida *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, another study showed that HvPhyC indeed affects circadian oscillations and interacts with the *Ppd-H1* pathway to promote flowering (Pankin *et al.*, 2014). This is similar to wheat PhyC that activates *PPD1* and *FT1* in inductive LDs (Chen *et al.*, 2014).

In rice, the photoperiodic pathway is of major importance as rice does not require vernalization. Although flowering in SDs, rice shares many features with the photoperiodic pathway in *Arabidopsis* (Shrestha *et al.*, 2014). The orthologue of GI, *OsGI*, is rhythmically expressed and activates expression of *Heading Date 1* (*Hd1*), the CO orthologue, in both SDs and LDs (Hayama *et al.*, 2003). *Hd1* shows a similar rhythm to *Arabidopsis* CO but it has opposing effects on the *FT* orthologue *Heading Date 3a* (*Hd3a*), activating *Hd3a* in inductive SDs and repressing it in non-inductive LDs. Thus, *Hd1* appears to be converted to a floral repressor by light exposure in LDs, and coincidence of the *Hd1* peak with darkness triggers flowering (Ishikawa *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to *Arabidopsis*, a pathway operating in parallel to the *OsGI-Hd1* module also activates *Hd3a*. *EARLY HEADING DATE 1* (*Ehd1*), a response regulator without a correlate in *Arabidopsis*, activates *RFT1*, another *FT* orthologue (Doi *et al.*, 2004). *RFT1* promotes flowering in SDs but also in LDs, adjusting flowering to environments differing in photoperiod. The *Ehd1-RFT1* pathway is repressed by GRAIN NUMBER, PLANT HEIGHT AND HEADING DATE7 (*Ghd7*), a CCT domain protein (Xue *et al.*, 2008). The rice ELF3 homologue, *OsELF3*, activates *Ehd1* to promote flowering in SDs and represses *Ghd7* to promote flowering in LDs (Zhao *et al.*, 2012).

The SD plant *Sorghum* uses an orthologue of *Ehd1*, *SbEHD1*, to activate flowering in SDs (Yang *et al.*, 2014). *SbEHD1* itself is activated via the *SbGI-SbCO* module in SDs. *PRR37* inhibits flowering in LDs by inhibiting *SbEHD1*

and CO activity. Thus, *PRR37* acts as a repressor of flowering in sorghum.

In *Beta vulgaris* that occurs in both an annual and a biennial form, BOLTING TIME CONTROL1 (*BvBTC1*) is a key regulator (Pin *et al.*, 2012). The biennial variety contains a recessive *Bvbtc1* allele and requires vernalization to flower in LDs. The annual variety contains a dominant *BvBTC1* allele that promotes bolting independently of vernalization through inhibition of the repressor *BvFT1* and activation of *BvFT2*. While not much is known about circadian control in beet, *BvBTC1* shows homology to the clock component *PRR7*. Recently, an additional regulator of bolting time was identified that oscillates across the day and also acts upstream of *BvFT1* and *BvFT2* (Dally *et al.*, 2014). Its closest homologue in *Arabidopsis* is *BBX19*, with two B-box zinc fingers similar to CO but without a CCT domain. It has been proposed that *BvBBX19* with its two B-box zinc fingers and *BvBTC1* with a CCT domain complement each other through interaction to fulfil a function similar to *Arabidopsis* CO with both B-box protein interaction domains and a CCT DNA-binding domain combined (Dally *et al.*, 2014). As described above, protein-protein interaction between *Arabidopsis* *BBX19* and CO antagonizes CO activity (C.-Q. Wang *et al.*, 2014). A detailed comparison of the mode of action of how beet *BvBBX19* and *BBX19* contribute to fine-tune the expression of *FT* genes will provide valuable insights into flowering time regulation in annual and biennial varieties.

Conclusion

Photoperiodic flower induction has been extensively studied on the molecular level. Key elements are promotive and repressive factors that shape the daily expression pattern of the floral regulators CO and FT by affecting transcription, chromatin structure, protein stability, and protein interaction. Other flowering time pathway promote flowering through disabling repressors of *FT*. A common theme is transcriptional up-regulation of *FT* in inductive photoperiods. While the CO-FT module is conserved between LD and SD plants, the molecular details leading to *FT* transcription are distinct and provide the basis for differential response to SDs or LDs. New components impacting the photoperiodic response continue to be discovered in crop plants, but also in *Arabidopsis*. These will have to be characterized functionally and placed into the photoperiodic pathway.

Acknowledgements

MJ is supported by an Alexander von Humboldt fellowship. Research in our laboratory is supported by the DFG (STA653 and SPP1530).

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