# Fast Generation of Regular Graphs and Construction of Cages

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## ABSTRACT

The construction of complete lists of regular graphs up to isomorphism is one of the oldest problems in constructive combinatorics. In this paper an efficient algorithm to generate regular graphs with given number of vertices and vertex degree is introduced. The method is based on orderly generation refined by criteria to avoid isomorphism checking and combined with a fast test for canonicity. The implementation allows to compute even large classes of graphs, like construction of the 4-regular graphs on 18 vertices and, for the first time, the 5-regular graphs on 16 vertices. Also in cases with given girth some remarkable results are obtained. For instance the 5-regular graphs with girth 5 and minimal number of vertices were generated in less than one hour. There exist exactly four (5,5)-cages.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Let $\mathcal{G}_n$ denote the set of simple labeled graphs with vertex set $\{1, ..., n\}$. The subset of $k$-regular graphs, i.e. those graphs where each vertex has degree exactly $k$, is called $\mathcal{R}_{n,k}$. $\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n$ is described by the set of its edges:

$$\Gamma = \{e_1, ..., e_t\} \subseteq \binom{\{1, ..., n\}}{2} =: X_n$$

If $e = (v, w) \in X_n$ denotes an edge, always $v < w$ is assumed. The symmetric group $S_n$ acts on $X_n$ and therefore induces actions on $\mathcal{G}_n$ and $\mathcal{R}_{n,k}$. $S_n \backslash\backslash \mathcal{G}_n$ and $S_n \backslash\backslash \mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ denote the orbits of these actions. By definition two labeled graphs are isomorphic if and only if they belong to the same orbit. Our aim is to compute a set of orbit representatives of $S_n \backslash\backslash \mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ (cf. [10]).

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## 2 ORDERLY GENERATION

To find a set of orbit representatives Read's technique of orderly generation [13] is used. $X_n$ is ordered in the following way: For $e = (v, w)$, $e' = (v', w') \in X_n$ we define

$$e < e' \;:\Longleftrightarrow\; v < v' \;\vee\; (v = v' \;\wedge\; w < w').$$

This induces a lexicographic order on $\mathcal{G}_n$: Let $\Gamma, \Gamma' \in \mathcal{G}_n$ with $\Gamma = \{e_1, ..., e_t\}$, $\Gamma' = \{e'_1, ..., e'_{t'}\}$, and $e_1 < ... < e_t$ , $e'_1 < ... < e'_{t'}$. Then

$$\begin{aligned}\Gamma < \Gamma' :\Longleftrightarrow \quad & (\exists i \leq \min\{t, t'\} : e_j = e'_j \forall j < i \wedge e_i < e'_i)\\ & \vee(t < t' \wedge e_j = e'_j \forall j \leq t)\end{aligned}$$

The canonical orbit representatives are defined to be minimal in their orbit:

$$\begin{aligned} rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{G}_n) &:= \{\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n \mid \forall \pi \in S_n : \Gamma \leq \Gamma^\pi\},\\ rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{R}_{n,k}) &:= \{\Gamma \in \mathcal{R}_{n,k} \mid \forall \pi \in S_n : \Gamma \leq \Gamma^\pi\}.\end{aligned}$$

The following theorem [9] provides the key for the computation of the minimal orbit representatives:

**2.1 Theorem:**
If $\Gamma \in rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{G}_n)$ each $\Gamma_1 \subset \Gamma$ with $\Gamma_1 < \Gamma$ fulfills $\Gamma_1 \in rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{G}_n)$.

*Proof:* Let $\Gamma = \Gamma_1 \cup \Gamma_2$ and $\Gamma_1 \notin rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{G}_n)$ and $\Gamma_1 < \Gamma$. Then $\Gamma_1^\pi < \Gamma_1$ for some $\pi \in S_n$. Let $\Gamma_1^\pi = \{e_1, ..., e_t\}$, $e_1 < ... < e_t$ and $\Gamma_1 = \{e'_1, ..., e'_t\}$, $e'_1 < ... < e'_t$. By $\Gamma_1^\pi < \Gamma_1$ exists $i := \min\{j \mid e_j < e'_j\}$. Now $\Gamma^\pi = \Gamma_1^\pi \cup \Gamma_2^\pi \supseteq \{e_1, ..., e_i\}$, and $\Gamma^\pi < \Gamma_1 < \Gamma$. This is a contradiction to the minimality of $\Gamma$. □

**2.2 Algorithm:**
Based on theorem 2.1 we can formulate a simple backtracking algorithm to compute $rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{R}_{n,k})$ starting with Ordrek({(1,2)}). Ordrek is defined as follows:

**Ordrek($\Gamma$)**

1. Check, whether $\Gamma$ can be extended to a $k$-regular Graph on $n$ vertices, if not: return;
2. Check, if $\Gamma \in rep_<(S_n\backslash\backslash\mathcal{G}_n)$, if not: return;
3. If $\Gamma \in \mathcal{R}_{n,k}$: add $\Gamma$ to the output; return;
4. For each $e \in X_n$ with $e > \max\{e' \in \Gamma\}$ call Ordrek($\Gamma \cup \{e\}$) with increasing $e$;

An element of $\mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ is only constructed if $\Gamma$ contains exactly $\frac{nk}{2}$ edges. At the intermediate stages we just have $\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n$. Of course any vertex should have degree at most $k$. Further necessary conditions for step 1 can be obtained by taking row and column sums of the adjacency matrix into account (cf. [12]). Indeed there seems to be no necessary and sufficient criterion to decide at any stage whether $\Gamma$ can become an element of $\mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ by inserting further edges, that is easy to check.

The most time consuming part is step 2: the minimality testing procedure. From the naive point of view one has to look at any permutation of $S_n$. Although algebraic and combinatorial methods are used to increase the efficiency, such a test remains quite expensive. For this reason it should be avoided as often as possible. The algorithm checks minimality after each insertion of a new edge. This means that graphs, which are at last added to the output had to pass the minimality test several times. On the other hand minimality tests for graphs that can not be completed to regular graphs should be omitted. It turned out to be more efficient to check minimality only when an element of $\mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ is computed. Unfortunately then the set of candidates for the minimality test grew much faster than the number of minimal orbit representatives. Our further efforts have the aim to reduce this set of candidates.

**2.3 Definition:**
For $\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n$ and $1 \leq i < n$ let $\Gamma_i := \{e = (v, w) \in \Gamma \mid v = i\}$,

$$\begin{aligned} C_1 &:= \{\pi \in S_n \mid \pi(1) = 1\}, \\ N_i &:= \{\pi \in C_i \mid {\Gamma_i}^\pi = \Gamma_i\}, \text{ and} \\ C_{i+1} &:= \{\pi \in N_i \mid \pi(i+1) = i+1\}. \end{aligned}$$

By Definition $\Gamma = \bigcup_{i=1}^{n-1} \Gamma_i$, $\Gamma_i \cap \Gamma_j = \emptyset$ $(i \neq j)$ and with $1 \leq i < j < n$: $e \in \Gamma_i$, $e' \in \Gamma_j \Rightarrow e < e'$. The following lemma shows a necessary criterion for $\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n$ being minimal. It is applied after every insertion of a new edge at step 4.

**2.4 Lemma (R. Grund):**
For $\Gamma \in rep_<(S_n \backslash\backslash \mathcal{G}_n)$ we have

$$\forall i < n: \ \forall \pi \in C_i: \quad \Gamma_i \leq {\Gamma_i}^\pi. \qquad (*)$$

*Proof:* Let $i_0$ be the smallest $i$ that does not fulfill $(*)$, i.e. $\exists \tau \in C_{i_0}$: ${\Gamma_{i_0}}^\tau < \Gamma_{i_0}$. Because of $C_{i_0} \leq N_j \ \forall j < i_0$ we have ${\Gamma_j}^\tau = \Gamma_j \ \forall j < i_0$. Therefore $\Gamma^\tau < \Gamma$, a contradiction to the minimality of $\Gamma$. □

Graphs with the property $(*)$ are called semicanonic in the sense of [6]. As each group $C_i$ and $N_i$ is a Young subgroup of $S_n$ these groups are easy to compute and semicanonicity can be achieved during insertion of the edges (cf. [5]). A further reduction of the candidate set based on a specific property of the chosen canonical form is obtained by

**2.5 Lemma (G. Brinkmann):**
If $\Gamma \in rep_<(S_n \backslash\backslash \mathcal{R}_{n,k})$ then there exists a cycle of minimal length in $\Gamma$ containing vertices 1, 2 and 3.

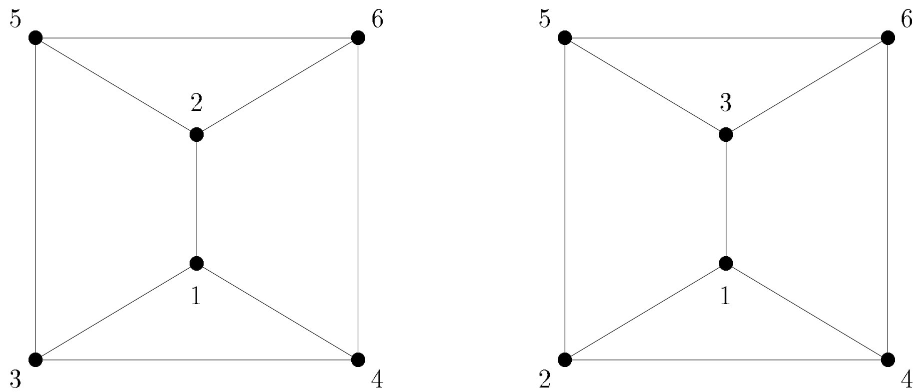


Figure 1: Semicanonical graphs where Lemma 2.5 can be applied.

A proof can be found in [1], where also the construction of such a cycle and the application of the lemma is described. For instance Figure 1 shows two semicanonical graphs on 6 vertices. By Lemma 2.5 nonminimality is detected and the minimality tests can be avoided. This criterion is most effective in the case of cubic graphs and becomes less important for higher degree (e.g. reduction of candidate set for $n = 18, k = 3$ by factor 10, for $n = 14, k = 4$ by factor 4). Main reason for this behaviour is the ratio of small cycles which is increased with the maximal possible degree.

As the girth is an important invariant of a regular graph and many graphtheoretic questions about regular graphs require a certain minimal girth, it can be important to be able to construct only $k$-regular graphs with a fixed lower bound $g$ of the girth. To be able to apply Lemma 2.5 we have to know the girth of the graph under consideration at any stage of the computation. Obviously by inserting further edges the girth cannot be increased. Once a graph with girth less than g is obtained, one can backtrack. This simple consideration shows a very straightforward way to construct only $k$-regular graphs with girth at least $g$.

# 3 TEST FOR MINIMALITY

This test has to decide whether a given $\Gamma \in \mathcal{R}_{n,k}$ fulfills

$$\Gamma \leq \Gamma^\pi \qquad \forall \pi \in S_n.$$

The centralizer of $1, ..., i$ is

$$U_i := \{\pi \in S_n \mid \pi(1) = 1, ..., \pi(i) = i\}.$$

We have the following chain of subgroups (Sims chain, [14],[11]):

$$S_n =: U_0 \geq U_1 \geq U_2 \geq ... \geq U_{n-1} = (id).$$

Now we consider each of these subgroups as a disjoint union of left cosets:

$$U_{i-1} = \bigcup_{j=i}^{n} (i,j)U_i, \qquad i = 1, ..., n-1.$$

The transpositions $(i,j)$ are representatives of left cosets; $(i,i)$ denotes the identity. Any $\pi \in S_n$ can be written in exactly one way as a product of such transpositions:

$$\pi = \prod_{i=1}^{n-1} (i, j_i), \qquad i \leq j_i \leq n, \quad 1 \leq i < n.$$

**3.1 Algorithm:**
Now you can run through $S_n$ as follows: Start at the smallest centralizer $U_{n-1}$ then run through the difference $U_{n-2} - U_{n-1}$. When all elements of $U_{n-2}$ are visited you can go on with $U_{n-3} - U_{n-2}$ ...

**Naivetest($\Gamma$)**
Run through $S_n$ in the way described above. Decide, whether

$$\Gamma \leq \Gamma^{(1,j_1)(2,j_2)...(n-1,j_{n-1})}, \qquad i \leq j_i \leq n, \quad 1 \leq i < n,$$

if not: return (not minimal);

We still have to consider any permutation of $S_n$. A first improvement is achieved by

**3.2 Lemma (R. Grund):**
For $j > i$ let $\pi \in U_i$ be the first permutation found when running through $(i,j)U_i$ with $\Gamma^{(i,j)\pi} = \Gamma$. Then $\Gamma \leq \Gamma^{(i,j)\sigma}$ $\forall \sigma \in U_i$.

*Proof:* We have $\Gamma^\tau \geq \Gamma$ $\forall \tau \in U_i$ (by definition of naivetest). Then for $\sigma \in U_i$ we obtain $\Gamma^{(i,j)\sigma} = \Gamma^{\pi^{-1}\sigma} \geq \Gamma$. □

The remaining elements of $(i,j)U_i$ may be neglected and testing is continued at the next coset. This way we get a Sims chain of the automorphism group of the graph, supposed it is a minimal orbit representative. This is an important feature, if we use the graphs as input for further construction algorithms like the one introduced in [7] and [8]. For further refinements to the minimal testing procedure see [6] and [12].

Even if the candidate is not minimal, you gain valuable information: A necessary condition for the canonicity of the lexicographic successors.

**3.3 Lemma (R. Grund):**
Let $\Gamma \in \mathcal{G}_n$ be not minimal, $\Gamma = \{e_1, ..., e_t\}$ with $e_1 < e_2 < ... < e_t$.
Then there exists $\pi \in S_n$ and $i < t$ with $\Gamma > \Gamma^\pi = \{e_1, ..., e_i, e'_{i+1}, ..., e'_t\}$ and $e_{i+1} > e'_{i+1}$.
Let $\{e_1^{\pi^{-1}}, ..., e_i^{\pi^{-1}}, {e'}_{i+1}^{\pi^{-1}}\} = \{e_{j_1}, ..., e_{j_{i+1}}\}$ with $1 \leq j_l \leq t$ for $l = 1, ..., i+1$.
Let $r := \max\{j_1, ..., j_{i+1}, i+1\}$, then each $\tilde{\Gamma} \in \mathcal{G}_n$ with $\tilde{\Gamma} = \{e_1, ..., e_r, \tilde{e}_{r+1}, ..., \tilde{e}_s\}$, $e_1 < ... < e_r < \tilde{e}_{r+1} < ... < \tilde{e}_s$ is also not minimal.

*Proof:* By $r \geq i+1$ we have $\tilde{\Gamma} = \{e_1, ..., e_i, e_{i+1}, ..., e_r, \tilde{e}_{r+1}, ..., \tilde{e}_s\}$.
Further $\tilde{\Gamma}^\pi = \{e_1^\pi, ..., e_r^\pi, \tilde{e}_{r+1}^\pi, ..., \tilde{e}_s^\pi\} \supseteq \{e_{j_1}^\pi, ..., e_{j_{i+1}}^\pi\} = \{e_1, ..., e_i, e'_{i+1}\}$
$\Longrightarrow \tilde{\Gamma}^\pi < \tilde{\Gamma}$ by $e'_{i+1} < e_{i+1}$. $\square$

This means: If a non-minimal candidate was tested, determine $r$ as in the lemma above and return to the last stage of the backtracking algorithm with $e_r \notin \Gamma$.

# 4 RESULTS

The introduced methods are implemented in C. The program *genreg* is designed for UNIX machines, but also runs on PC's with DOS or WINDOWS. A manual for the program, the source code and the executables are available via http://www.mathe2.uni-bayreuth.de/markus/reggraphs.html. From this site you can even download various lists and some drawings of regular graphs.

Table 1 shows results of the program for runs with given number $n$ of vertices and degree $k$. It contains the number of computed regular graphs, the total number of candidates for the minimality test, the quotient of these two numbers and the CPU-times for computation on a PC Pentium Pro with 200 MHz. Some numbers were formerly unpublished and the content exceeds similar tables as e.g. in [4].

Results for the cases with prescribed girth larger than 3 and numbers of bipartite regular graphs are collected in Tables 2-5. In these tables no CPU-times are given, because some of the computations were done in several runs on different machines. Blanks in the tables mean that the corresponding numbers are not yet known. Corresponding numbers of cubic graphs can be found in [1].

The smallest $k$-regular graphs with girth $g$ are called $(k, g)$-cages. The $(5, 5)$-cages have 30 vertices and there exist exactly four of them (see Table 4). This was first claimed by Yang and Zhang [16] in 1989. The construction of these four graphs takes 41 minutes on the PC described above. The upper left of the (5,5)-cages in Figure 2 is neither mentioned in [15] nor in [3]. It has an automorphism group of order 96 and two orbits of length 6 and 24. The other (5,5)-cages (upper right/lower left/lower right) have automorphism groups of order 30/20/120 and 2/4/2 orbits of length 15,15/5,5,10,10/10,20. Further information can be found in Gordon Royle's catalog of cages at http://www.cs.uwa.edu.au:80/gordon/cages/allcages.html.

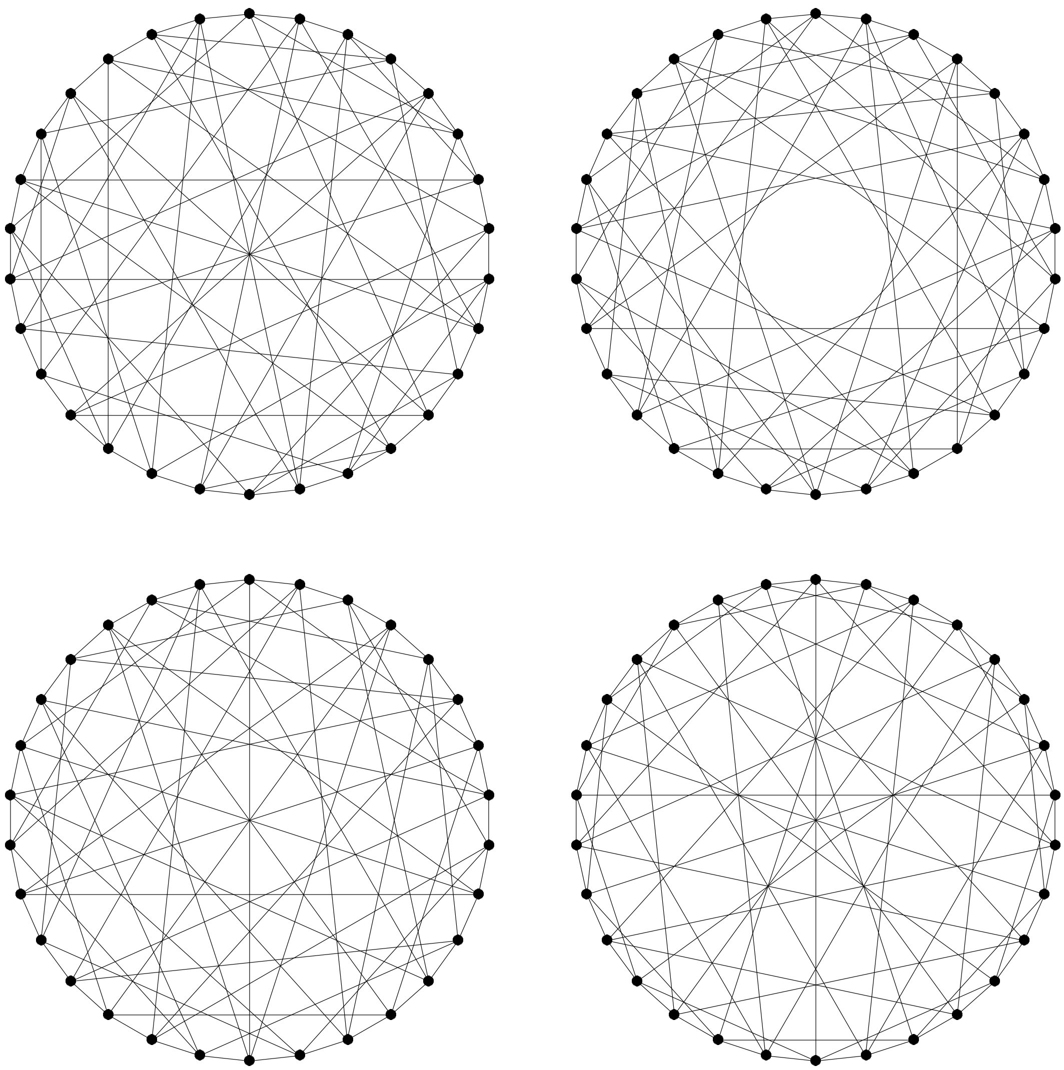

Figure 2: The four (5,5)-cages.

It turned out, that graph generators like the introduced one are an important tool to confirm or disprove graph-theoretical conjectures (cf. [2], [17]). Everyone who has an open question on regular graphs is encouraged to contact the author in order to decide whether the solution is in reach of the generator.

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| $n$ | $k$ | Graphs | Candidates | Cand./Graph | CPU-time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 6 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 8 | 3 | 5 | 10 | 2.00 | 0.0 s |
| 10 | 3 | 19 | 37 | 1.95 | 0.0 s |
| 12 | 3 | 85 | 214 | 2.52 | 0.0 s |
| 14 | 3 | 509 | 1406 | 2.76 | 0.1 s |
| 16 | 3 | 4060 | 10432 | 2.57 | 1.0 s |
| 18 | 3 | 41301 | 96279 | 2.33 | 10.8 s |
| 20 | 3 | 510489 | 1079585 | 2.11 | 2 min 19 s |
| 22 | 3 | 7319447 | 14341762 | 1.96 | 34 min 44 s |
| 24 | 3 | 117940535 | 217873241 | 1.85 | 9 h 43 min |
| 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 7 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 2.50 | 0.0 s |
| 8 | 4 | 6 | 14 | 2.33 | 0.0 s |
| 9 | 4 | 16 | 57 | 3.56 | 0.0 s |
| 10 | 4 | 59 | 219 | 3.71 | 0.0 s |
| 11 | 4 | 265 | 997 | 3.76 | 0.1 s |
| 12 | 4 | 1544 | 5194 | 3.36 | 0.3 s |
| 13 | 4 | 10778 | 33139 | 3.07 | 2.5 s |
| 14 | 4 | 88168 | 251546 | 2.85 | 22.8 s |
| 15 | 4 | 805491 | 2177590 | 2.70 | 3 min 35 s |
| 16 | 4 | 8037418 | 20656320 | 2.57 | 35 min 59 s |
| 17 | 4 | 86221634 | 212449363 | 2.46 | 6 h 28 min |
| 18 | 4 | 985870522 | 2354685107 | 2.39 | 3 d 2 h |
| 6 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 8 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 3.33 | 0.0 s |
| 10 | 5 | 60 | 291 | 4.85 | 0.1 s |
| 12 | 5 | 7848 | 24306 | 3.10 | 2.3 s |
| 14 | 5 | 3459383 | 9503164 | 2.75 | 18 min 3 s |
| 16 | 5 | 2585136675 | 6834826727 | 2.64 | 9 d 6 h |
| 7 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 8 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1.00 | 0.0 s |
| 9 | 6 | 4 | 18 | 4.50 | 0.0 s |
| 10 | 6 | 21 | 159 | 7.57 | 0.0 s |
| 11 | 6 | 266 | 1407 | 5.29 | 0.1 s |
| 12 | 6 | 7849 | 26416 | 3.37 | 2.8 s |
| 13 | 6 | 367860 | 1018030 | 2.77 | 2 min 13 s |
| 14 | 6 | 21609300 | 55550457 | 2.57 | 2 h 8 min |
| 15 | 6 | 1470293675 | 3668827079 | 2.50 | 6 d 4 h |

Table 1: Connected regular graphs.

| $n$ | $k = 4$ | $k = 5$ | $k = 6$ | $k = 7$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 13 | 31 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | 220 | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| 15 | 1606 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 16 | 16828 | 388 | 9 | 1 |
| 17 | 193900 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| 18 | 2452818 | 406824 | 267 | 8 |

Table 2: Connected regular graphs with girth at least 4.

| $n$ | $k = 4$ |
|---|---|
| 26 | 1 |
| 27 | 0 |
| 28 | 1 |
| 29 | 0 |
| 30 | 4 |
| 31 | 0 |
| 32 | 19 |
| 33 | 0 |
| 34 | 1272 |

Table 3: Connected regular graphs with girth at least 6.

| $n$ | $k = 4$ | $k = 5$ |
|---|---|---|
| 17 | 0 | 0 |
| 18 | 0 | 0 |
| 19 | 1 | 0 |
| 20 | 2 | 0 |
| 21 | 8 | 0 |
| 22 | 131 | 0 |
| 23 | 3917 | 0 |
| 24 | 123859 | 0 |
| 25 | 4131991 | 0 |
| 26 | | 0 |
| 28 | | 0 |
| 30 | | 4 |

Table 4: Connected regular graphs with girth at least 5.

| $n$ | $k = 4$ | $k = 5$ |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | 1 | 0 |
| 10 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | 4 | 1 |
| 14 | 14 | 4 |
| 16 | 129 | 41 |
| 18 | 1980 | 1981 |
| 20 | 62611 | 304495 |
| 22 | 2806490 | |

Table 5: Connected biparite regular graphs.

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