

Simple Lichen Facts

What are they?

- A fungus and an alga benefit from living together in a **symbiotic relationship**.
- Together they form a **lichen**
- The alga converts sunlight to sugar
- All lichens are named after the fungus
- The fungus provides the main evolutionary path by sexual reproduction

Where do they grow

- 1/6 of the earth is covered in lichens
- There are over 18 thousand different types
- Many grow on stone
- You often see them on trees

In this churchyard you can see them growing on the church walls, gravestones and trees

What do they look like?

- There are three main groups which are identified by shape
 - Leafy – looks like a leaf
 - Shrubby – has lots of divide fronds
 - Crusty – hugs the stone that it grows on
- They are beautiful colours – green, orange, yellow, red, and grey

Some more facts about lichens

- Animals eg deer and mice and birds like to eat lichens
- Lichens can be used for making dye to colour wool and cloth
- Lichens grow slowly and can be a hundred years old
- Lichens can tell us if the air is clean or dirty
- They are mainly found on north and east facing walls and trees so this fact could help you if you are lost.
- Lichens spread in two ways
 - By spores produced by the fungus part of the lichen
 - Through little bits of the lichen containing both fungus and alga breaking off to form new lichens

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Take a lens and look at the lichens on the church walls, trees and gravestones. In particular look at the old gravestones in front of the church, at the wall at the back of the church (4 buttresses along) and the oak tree in the far corner of the churchyard. Here are some pictures of lichens in our churchyard:



A yellow crusty lichen



A green-grey leafy lichen



A rare shubby lichen on the church N wall



A leafy lichen on our oak tree



Lichens may grow on gravestones below where a bird has sat on the top and used it as a loo. Spores of the lichen in their poo then germinate in a “waterfall” down the stone. Can you spot where this gravestone is?