

Fungi

Fungi are a group of living organisms which are classified in their own kingdom. This means they are not animals, plants, or bacteria. Fungi were once classified as plants. However, they are different from plants in two important ways: 1) fungi cell walls are composed of chitin rather than cellulose (plants) and 2) fungi do not make their own food like plants do through photosynthesis.

Fungi are found throughout the Earth including on land, in the water, in the air, and even in plants and animals. They vary widely in size from microscopically small to the largest organisms on Earth at several square miles large. There are more than 100,000 different identified species of fungi.



Roles of Fungi

- **Food** - Many fungi are used as food such as mushrooms and truffles. Yeast, a type of fungi, is used when baking bread to help it rise and to ferment beverages.
- **Decomposition** - Fungi play an important role in the decomposition of organic matter. This decomposition is necessary for many of the cycles of life such as the carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen cycles. By breaking down organic matter, fungi release carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen into the soil and the atmosphere.
- **Medicine** - Some fungi are used to kill bacteria that can cause infections and disease in humans. They make antibiotics like penicillin and cephalosporin.

Some of the more common fungi that you are likely to see or use every day are listed below.

- **Mushrooms** - Some mushrooms are good to eat and are used as food, while others are very poisonous. Never eat a mushroom you find in the woods!
- **Mould** - Moulds tend to form on old fruit, bread, and cheese.
- **Yeast** - Yeasts are important in making bread rise.

