

FUNGI by Dave and Gill Shearing.

Fungi are organisms that live underground or in their host, which might be a tree or a dead animal.

They form a colony of tiny, branched threads called **Mycelium**, which are not always obvious to the naked eye. The parts of Fungi that we usually see above ground or on the surface of their host are actually, just the fruiting bodies.

Fungi don't photosynthesise like plants as they don't have any Chlorophyll, so they get their energy from soil, leaf litter, rotting wood or decaying animals.

The fruiting bodies come in many shapes, sizes and colours and are seen mostly in woodland during the Autumn and Winter. They are responsible for producing abundant, tiny spores which, like seeds in plants, enable the Fungi to spread. Most spores are spread far and wide by wind.

It has been estimated that a Giant Puffball can produce seven Trillion spores and if every spore germinated, they would produce Puffballs 800 times the volume of the Earth! Only a tiny proportion of the spores end up landing in an area with perfect conditions for germination otherwise we would be in trouble.

Many Fungi are good to eat, and some are consumed in large quantities around the World. The problem comes when you eat a species of Fungi that is poisonous to humans. Fortunately, relatively few British Fungi are poisonous, although some would make you feel very unwell. Two of the most dangerous species are the aptly named Death Cap and the Destroying Angel.



Both look a bit like the mushrooms we get from the supermarket, but you will be in dire straits if you eat as little as part of a cap. After 8-12 hours you will feel extremely nauseous with vomiting and your blood pressure will drop.

