



Building Bridges to Nature

Nature Discovery Activities from the South Carolina Botanical Garden

What is it?

Lichens are a symbiotic, mutualistic relationship between an algae or a cyano-bacteria, a fungus, and basidiomycetes. This is a fancy way of saying they are made up of three things, each with a different function. These combined elements have different properties from the individual components. Everyday, scientists are finding out more about lichens and how they work - only recently did they find out there were three and not two elements to a lichen!

Where is it?

Lichen grow almost everywhere. Since they grow where nothing else will, they are important for initial soil formation. In your garden look for lichen on tree trunks and branches, stones, benches and more. Where do you find lichens in your garden? What kinds do you find?

Guides & Info

[Carry Along Guide](#)

[A short video](#)

[More information](#)

Science

Lichens are very sensitive to pollution. The lichen you have or don't have in your garden can tell a great deal about air quality in your area. Which lichens do you find in your neighborhood? Using the guides and other sources what can you discover about your air quality. This is an [activity](#) to learn about your air quality from lichens - try it!

Culture

Wolf lichen (*Letharia vulpina*) was the most widely used lichen for dyeing by Native Americans throughout the U.S.

Many *Usnea* species have medicinal, particularly antibacterial properties. Several lichens are reported to be edible, but not particularly tasty.