

# Findings from the Field

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## Looking for Lichen

By Izzy N

On October 29th, 2021, I went to Pawtuckaway State Park in Nottingham, New Hampshire and went on a hike with my class. It was mildly windy and sunny, but not particularly warm. While I was on the trail up to the South Mountain, I kept noticing that all the different trees had something in common. They all had some type of plant that resembled moss growing on them. I had also noticed this on the gravestones in the old cemetery. I thought it was strange how it was growing on the trees and stones instead of growing from out of the ground. On one tree I took a closer look and saw that it wasn't even growing from any dirt. It was almost like it was part of the bark. I found myself wondering how it grows like that and what it even is.

I found out that it is called a lichen. Lichen is not a plant, it is a living organism that is fungi and algae in a mutual relationship.. Most people assume it is moss when they first look at it but it is not. Lichens are symbiotic relationships between a fungus and an alga. Lichens are found on many surfaces and make their own food using photosynthesis. It gets energy from the sun and then creates sugars that is consumes to grow bigger ([extension.psu.edu](https://extension.psu.edu)). By living on trees, lichens get a good amount of sunlight and rainwater in order to produce their own food. There are three primary types of lichen, foliose lichen, fruticose lichen and crustose lichen. Foliose lichens are flat with ridges and bumps on their edges. Fruticose lichen grow upright and look similar to hair or branches. And lastly crustose lichens are like crusts, they come in very bright, varying colors. The lichen I was examining was a foliose lichen ([fs.fed.us](https://fs.fed.us)). You can tell because of the shape and size it grows in. Lichen can grow on any undisturbed surface, such as rocks, bark, soil or even metal. When lichens grow on trees they do not disturb the tree at all, it doesn't cause disease or eat away at the bark. Whereas crustose lichen, when they grow on rocks, they let out acid that wears down the minerals of the rock which causes the rock to break. Also when you see lichen on your trees don't be stressed. Lichen is sensitive to air pollution so if you see lots of lichen that indicates that the area you're in has good air quality. ([courrierpostonline.com](https://courrierpostonline.com) )

Since I learned what lichen is, I'm still wondering how lichens help benefit the ecosystems it grows in. To keep discovering new things about lichen I would like to explore different ecosystems with lichen and discover the differences and similarities. I am very amazed at how lichens grow on so many different surfaces. I took a picture of some lichen, which you can see below.



**Sites Used**

<https://extension.psu.edu/lichen-in-the-garden>

<https://www.courierpostonline.com/story/life/home-garden/2014/08/18/lichen-lot-tell-trees/14266907/>