

# FREAKY FUNGUS



## THEY'RE EVERYWHERE!

They are not animals, plants or bacteria. They are all around you, though you may have seen them only when they "fruit" – as mushrooms and mould.

Fungi are found on all continents, including Antarctica! They grow on rocks, in soils, in water, on plants, in the roots of plants, on tree trunks, on leaves, even in the feathers of birds and in your hair, skin and nails. Some are useful and some are deadly!

## A FUNGAL FEAST

Many of you have probably eaten mushrooms on your pizza, maybe even different kinds of them. You've also probably had soy sauce in your noodles – this is made with a fungus known as *Aspergillus*.

There is another kind of fungus that we use in our cooking – yeast. Some types of yeast are essential for making many of the foods we love such as idlis, bread or *naan*. Yeasts feast on the ingredients of these food and rapidly multiply, and while they do so, they add to the taste and change the texture of these foods.

## FOR THE FIELD DIARY

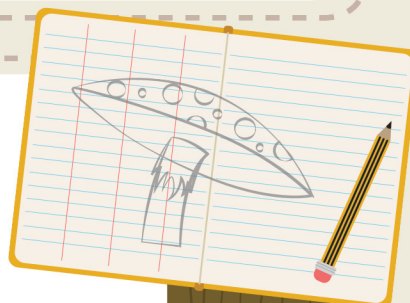
There are approximately 27,000 kinds of fungi recorded in India and 850 of them are mushrooms. Let's go fungi-hunting and see how many you can find:

**Bracket fungi** - They are like little shelves on living and dead tree trunks; they infect the trees.

**Black mould** - They are black spots on walls and wet ceilings, sometimes growing out of walls as a fuzz.

**Mushrooms** - They can be white or yellow. It's not a good idea to pick them and bring them home as the poisonous mushrooms are difficult to tell apart from the edible ones.

When you come across a fungus, describe and draw it. Where did you find it? Look at the bracket fungi and mushrooms carefully – draw their upper as well as their undersides. What colours are they? Remember to wash your hands after touching the fungi!

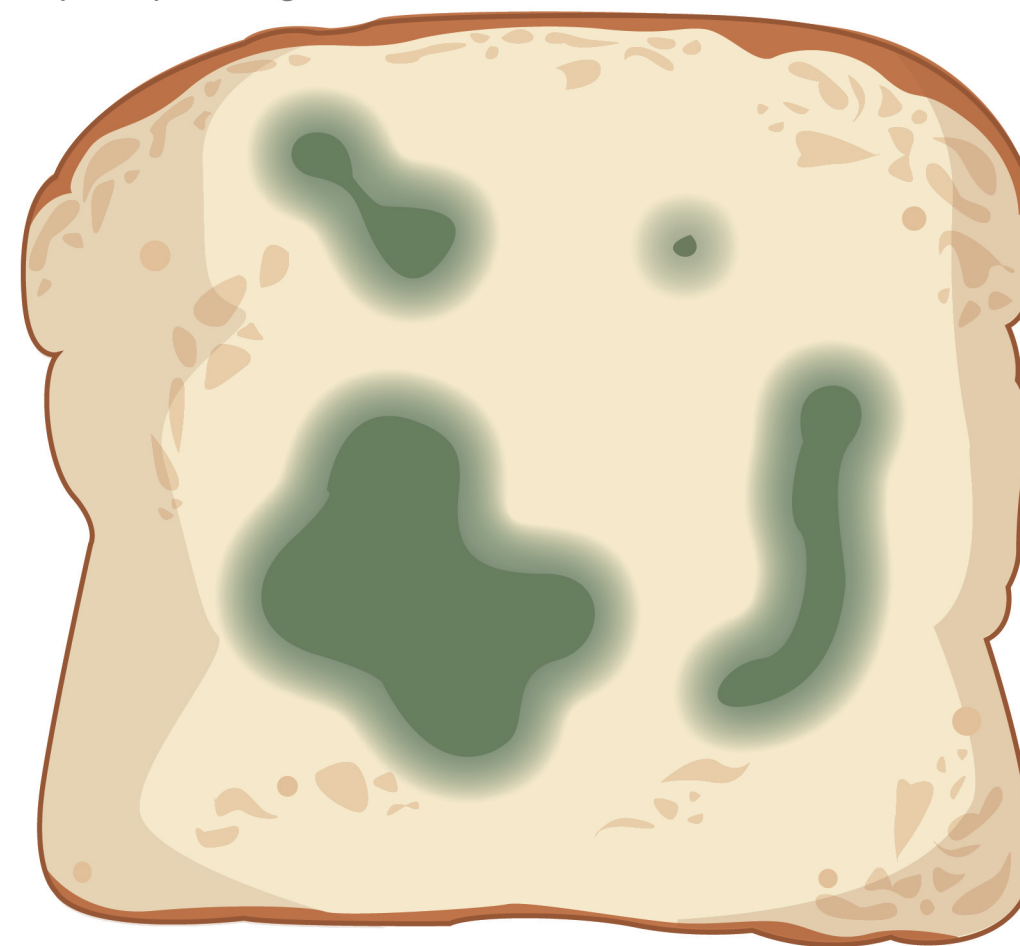


## GROWING MOULD AT HOME

Moulds are a group of fungi. You've probably seen them on slices of bread that have been left out for a while. Now is your chance to see under what conditions mould best grows.

Fungi are all around us, often floating about in the air. They cannot make their own food, which is why they often settle down and use our food to grow and multiply.

Take a few slices of white bread and place each one on a dry paper plate. Seal one slice in a transparent plastic bag.



Sprinkle a few drops of water on another slice (don't make it soggy) and seal it in a plastic bag as well. Do not open the bags, but do check on them daily. When you see coloured patches on the bread slices, note their colour. Look at them closely and describe what you see in your field diary.

## WRITE TO US!

Write to us at [edu@ncf-india.org](mailto:edu@ncf-india.org) and tell us about the different kinds of fungi you see around you! Send us your drawings and descriptions from your field diary, and tell us how you fared with growing mould at home.