

PLANTS JUNIOR

Plants form the basis of the survival of all living things. In fact, they supply the majority of the oxygen that animals and men breathe and also the majority of the food that they consume.

The plant kingdom includes about 350,000 very different species. In fact, trees, shrubs, bushes, grasses, creepers, succulents, ferns, algae, mosses and many more belong to this kingdom.

The majority of existing and classified plants belong to the angiosperm group that has about 250,000 species that are characterised by the production of flowers and of seeds closed and protected within a fruit.

Flowering plants also have a stem, leaves and roots. The roots and leaves contain the **xylem**, a tissue necessary for the transport of water and mineral salts, and the **phloem** that distributes the nutrients produced by the plant. Each part of the plant has a different function: roots help to anchor the plant and absorb water and mineral salts from the soil; leaves produce the plant's food and flowers contain the reproductive organs. Many flowers are colourful and sweet-smelling to attract birds and insects that feed on the nectar that they find in them. Then flying from flower to flower they carry the male pollen to a female stigma. Grasses and plants with small flowers, instead, use wind for pollination.

Unlike animals, plants are stationary and cannot go in search of food. For this reason, they produce their own food through photosynthesis. To carry out this chemical process a plant needs three ingredients: light, chlorophyll and carbon dioxide. Chlorophyll is a green pigment that can be found only in the green parts of a plant, generally in the leaves; in some particular cases, such as in cacti, it can even be found in the stem which, in fact, is totally green. Leaves absorb sunlight and "breathe in" carbon dioxide. From these three elements, plants can produce the sugars necessary for their nourishment and with the addition of carbon dioxide can produce oxygen that is released into the atmosphere.

The majority of plants keep on growing until they die, contrary to man and animals that stop growing at the end of adolescence. This occurs because the bigger the leaves and roots, for example, the greater the amount of nutrient elements, useful to growth, that can be absorbed.