

FUNGI JUNIOR

The fungus kingdom includes all those organisms that are commonly known as mushrooms (a vast group of multicellular organisms, to which even edible mushrooms belong), yeasts (unicellular organisms that have a fermentative capacity) and moulds (microscopic organisms such as the green-coloured *Penicillium*).

This kingdom is made up of organisms that feed by absorbing organic substances that are present in the surrounding environment. In fact, fungi produce molecules called digestive enzymes, which are utilised to break down organic material in order to facilitate absorption.

For the most part, fungi are pluricellular, made up of a mass of filaments and found practically in every environment. A group of fungi, commonly known as yeasts, includes unicellular organisms such as the yeast that has been used from ancient times in baking and for the production of beer and wine.

Some mushrooms are parasites of animals, plants, protists and even of other fungi; others instead, absorb nutrients decomposing dead organic matter (they are called saprobes) and make a significant contribution to the decomposition process of organic material. Some species have developed complex symbioses with photosynthetic organisms; this is the case of mycorrhizae and lichens.