



Relationship #24



There are hundreds of "species" of lichens. A lichen looks like a plant, but is actually a complicated association between a species of fungus and a species of either a green algae or a blue-green algae. Although lichens come in a wide variety of forms and structures, all lichens are essentially a sandwich with a layer of fungi on the outside with a filling of an algal species on the inside. The fungus species attaches the lichen structure to the log, rock, or brick wall it lives on and absorbs nutrients from the environment. In addition, the fungus forms a protective envelope for the algae preventing the algae from drying out. The algae in its turn uses the nutrients absorbed by the fungus and the carbon dioxide produced to photosynthesize. The sugars and oxygen produced by the algae are, in turn, used for food by the fungus. This highly successful relationship between the two species allows lichens to colonize habitats that are hardly survivable by other plant and animal species.