

Fascinating Facts: here are just a few for starters, you can find others in the references in the leader's notes – use them as you like.

- It was not always so easy to go on fungal forays. In ancient Egypt, the consumption of mushrooms was a privilege restricted to the pharaoh and his family – a commoner was forbidden even to touch one!
- Mushroom poisoning was a problem even in ancient Rome. Emperor Claudius died at the hand of his third wife Agrippina, who fed him a poison mushroom in order to ensure that her son Nero would become the next emperor.
- People have also been using fungi for purposes other than food for thousands of years. Tinder material prepared from the bracket fungus, *Fomes fomentarius*, was found with the frozen remains of a Neolithic man in an alpine glacier in 1991, and have been dated to 3350 – 3100BC
- Fairy rings in Germany are allegedly caused by dragons flying in circles and scorching the earth beneath them with their tails.
- An individual Honey Fungus (*Armillaria* species) is claimed to be the world's largest and oldest living organism. It is estimated to be 1500 years old and to weigh more than 10,000kg.
- It is said that the ancient highlanders used to pack their circular shields (targes) with dried material from the Birch Bolete (*Piptoporus betulinus*). The fungus is light and tough and is a good shock absorber. It was also used for honing blades (the Victorians called it the 'razor strop' fungus and cleaned and sharpened their old fashioned razor blades on it). Good job that this fungus also has some antiseptic qualities!
- One bracket, a Dryad's Saddle (*Polyporus squamosus*), is recorded as reaching a weight of 14kg in only three weeks.
- The first discovered antibiotic – penicillin – is from a mould *Penicillium notatum*. The discovery was probably one of the greatest medical advances of the 20th century.

