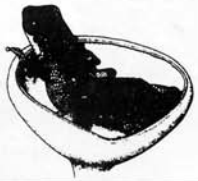
# FUNGI IN SCHOOLS

for
CHILDREN
TEACHERS
PARENTS

*and other interested parties*



## FAIRY RINGS

***DO YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES?***

(If the answer is a scornful 'No' then start reading half way down)

Have you ever noticed rings of dark green grass on lawns or in fields? They will probably be Fairy Rings and if you look carefully you should see two rings of darker green grass separated by a narrow brown strip where the grass looks compressed and dead. For hundreds of years people thought that this brown ring was caused by fairies or elves dancing around their magic circle. It was thought lucky to have a Fairy Ring near your home but not very safe to step inside one as this might bring bad luck. It was not until 1792 that an English botanist, William Withering, suggested that it was not fairies that caused these rings but the growth of a fungus. The fungus is a small toadstool with the common name 'Fairy Ring Champignon' and a scientific one of *Marasmius oreades*. Other fungi can also cause rings and some are very ancient indeed. Rings of the fungus *Calvatia* growing in the USA are thought to be between 250-400 years old. Do you remember the mushroom we looked at in January 1987 and the spore print from the millions of spores that fall from gills beneath the cap? Now we are filling in the gap between spores and mushrooms. Each spore can germinate; this means that it puts out a small tube which goes on growing and branching and making a great network of threads each one known as a **hypha** and altogether as **mycelium**. The growth will be more or less circular and the fruitbodies (or toadstools) are produced around the outer edge. If you look near the dark green grass of Fairy Rings in the autumn you will probably see the small (4-6 cm high) pale brown, leathery fruitbodies of the 'Fairy Ring Champignon'. It is not really possible to see the fungal network or mycelium without wrecking the grass and we will think of ways of looking at mycelium another time.

*Sheila M Francis*

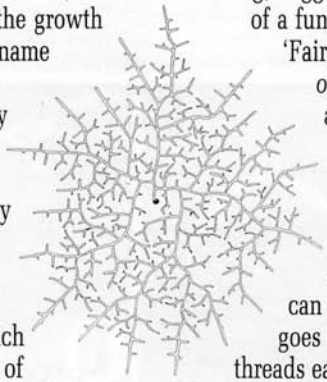


Fig. A spore and mycelium. From Kendrick, B, *A Young Person's Guide to the Fungi.* Mycologue Publ. (1986).

**Next time:** Fungus Foray 2.