

Have I found a moss?

Look closely at rocks, trees, pavements and walls, you might find mosses. These small green plants grow where other plants can't. Liverworts and lichens are similar to mosses and they are often found together. Keen eyes or a hand-lens will help you see features more clearly.

Find more nature guides or get in touch with our museum scientists for help with identification: museum.wales/collections/on-your-doorstep



Moss

Homalothecium sericeum

Mosses have stems with tiny pointed leaves and capsules raised on stalks above the leaves. The capsules are brownish and quite tough, and stay attached to the plants for several weeks. The spores inside are slowly released to germinate and grow into new moss plants. There are about 750 species of moss in the UK. They form mats and cushions on rocks and bark and carpets on the ground, wherever conditions are right.



Leafy liverwort

Lophocolea bidentata

Leafy liverworts are similar to mosses but their capsules look like silver matchsticks with black heads. They remain on the plants for a few days and release all the spores at once. The plants are more delicate and often found in wetter places than mosses. Liverworts leaves are in rows and are often divided at the tips. Moss leaves are usually spiralled. There are about 300 species of liverworts in the UK.



Thallose liverwort

Marchantia polymorpha

Thallose liverworts don't have leaves. They are solid and flat and spread across the ground. They are usually found on soil or bark and can be common in greenhouse pots. The capsules are similar to leafy liverworts, but are sometimes hidden inside umbrella-like receptacles on the plant surface. Some thallose liverworts are quite thin and delicate while others are large and firm.



Hornwort

Phaeoceros carolinianus

Hornworts are like thallose liverworts and don't have leaves. The capsules of hornworts are spikes, or horns, that grow from the surface of the plants. The spores are released from the tips of the horns over a long period of time. There are four species of hornwort in the UK and they are often overlooked when they don't have capsules as the thallose plant is often not obvious.



Lichen

Parmotrema perlatum

Unlike liverworts and mosses, lichens are not plants but a fungus and an alga living together in a symbiosis, benefitting each other. They are often greyish but can be bright yellow or orange. They also form patches on hard surfaces like trees, rocks, walls and pavements. Unlike mosses, liverworts and hornworts, they don't have capsules, and are often papery when dry. There are about 1800 species of lichen in the UK.