

Fantastic Fun Facts about Corticoid Fungi

by Lawrence Millman

1. Corticoid fungi are an assemblage of species from at least 10 different orders. Some mycologists regard the Corticiaceae as a “dustbin taxon” for fungi that don’t seem to fit in anywhere else. Commonly called crusts, these fungi often inspire this sort of derision, but knowledge makes the heart grow fonder ...

2. 88.7% of all crusts grow under logs. This means that they wear parkas (i.e., those logs themselves), and thus they do just fine in cold weather, which is why they tend to reign supreme in Christmas Mushroom Counts!

3. Most crusts have either effused (spreading without a regular form) or resupinate (flattened on the substrate) fruiting bodies. An exception: cyphelloids. This is not a sexual disease, but a term that describes the cup or disc-like morphology of a *Henningsomyces*, a *Rectipilus*, or a *Merismodes*.

4. Another exception: the Stereaceae. They’re often (but not always) pileate (with a cap) and likewise have a dimitic hyphal system (two types of hyphae), whereas most other crusts have a monomitic (single) one.



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Henningsomyces sp., showing cup-like morphology



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Stereum ostrea, the "false turkey tail," has a cap structure but is smooth on the underside, rather than having pores like a polypore would.

6. Most crusts are white rotters. The few brown rotters include *Plicatura*, *Coniophora*, and *Leucogyrophana* species. You can often tell how eagerly a crust rots its substrate by how difficult it is to remove from that substrate.

7. 91.9% of all crusts are saprobes. As with other fungal decomposers, our planet depends on their ability to recycle the compounds in plant materials.

5. Hymenophore (fruiting body) terms: appressed (difficult to remove); byssoid (cottony); hydroid (prominent teeth); irpicoid (irregular or flattened teeth); grandinoid (gifted with granules); tuberculate/verrucose (gifted with warts); fimbriate (fringed with rhizomorphs); rimose (cracked); and merulioid (having netlike folds).



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Plicatura nivea, a "brown rotter."

8. A small percentage of crusts are mycorrhizal, including *Byssocorticium*, *Piloderma*, *Tomentella*, *Amphinema*, *Athelia* (maybe), and *Trechispora* (maybe) species. A diagnostic feature: most mycorrhizal crusts are byssoid.



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Piloderma sp.

© Chris Neefus



A mycorrhizal crust, *Byssocorticium* sp., showing the byssoid growth form.

9. *Piloderma* species sometimes can be identified by the yellowish mats of hyphae they produce near the log of their choice.

10. A few crusts are parasites, including *Chondrostereum purpureum*, *Serpula* (Wet Rot), and *Coniophora* (Dry Rot) species. The most infamous of these, *Serpula*, degrades injured wood in a forest — might it consider the wood in a house injured, too?

11. Some crusts only grow on the bark of living trees. Examples: *Aleurodiscus*, *Corticium*, and *Dendrothele* species.

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Serpula himantioides, a parasite.

12. Certain crusts — for instance, many *Peniophora* species — are harmless endophytes. Only when the wood dies do their mycelia spring into action.

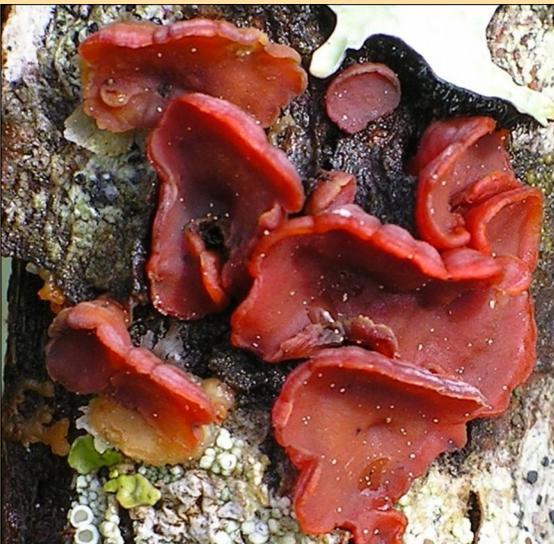
13. Newly fallen wood seldom boasts crusts.

14. *Cytidia salicina*, which grows mostly on willows, is a gelatinous(!) crust.

15. A few crusts are plant rotters. *Laetisaria fuciformis* is the cause of “red thread” disease in turf grass (location: major league ballparks), while *Butlerella eustacei* causes “fisheye rot,” a post harvest disease of stored apples.

16. Some crust species, like *Bulbilomyces*, produce sclerotia as asexual propagules. For more details, [click here](#).

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Cytidia salicina

17. Being (mostly) under logs and almost flush against the ground, crusts use insects as one of their primary vectors of spore dispersal.

18. Who says crusts can't be colorful? *Terana caerulea* is a royal blue, *Byssocorticium atrovirens* is green-blue, and *Phlebia radiata* is peachy-orange.

© Martin L'Vezey



Tarana caerulea

© Jessica Benson Evans



Phlebia radiata

19. And who says crusts can't be dramatic? The teeth of a *Hericium* or *Radulodon copelandii* would be considered fangs if they existed on an animal.

20. So let's celebrate "dustbin diving!"

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Radulodon copelandii

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