

# MOSS

**Scientific Name:** *Bryophyta*

**Irish Name:** Caonach

Mosses are perennial plants that like damp or wet places to grow. They can form tufts, mats and carpets of small plants, often less than 1-2 cm tall. Mosses generally colonise damp bare ground, walls, roofs and tree trunks, clinging on to surfaces with their numerous hair-like roots.

Most of the mosses' growth is between autumn and late spring, when the climate is wetter. They thrive in the mild, damp Irish climate and add greatly to our green landscape. However, though they need damp conditions to grow, many species can dry out and survive until re-wetted. Mosses are very absorbent and can hold water and absorb carbon. Irish bogs are mostly composed of moss, which builds up to form peat.

Ireland has almost 800 species of moss, including related liverworts. Liverworts are similar but more leafy or have lobed, flat fronds. Some mosses have specific growing requirements, for example some only grow on lime-rich soils, while others such as bog-mosses, will not tolerate lime.



Moss has dust-like spores instead of seeds. The bobbles on stalks that you see on moss contain the spores.



Moss forming a mat on a stone wall.

Image courtesy of Susan Murphy Wickers

## Many Uses For Moss

Moss has many uses. In flower arranging it is used for decorative purposes and in the garden it can be used to line hanging baskets to prevent the compost falling out through the holes. Being so absorbent moss has also been helpful in soaking up oil following oil spills. Bog mosses are said to have antiseptic properties and have been used to dress wounds. In Medieval times moss was even used as 'toilet paper'!

While moss in the lawn is considered a nuisance by some gardeners, others celebrate its beauty by making it a feature of the garden.



Gardens in Kyoto, Japan, where moss has become an important part of the display.

<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Saishou-kojien.jpg> (CC BY-SA 2.0) Courtesy of Namori

## North, South, East or West?

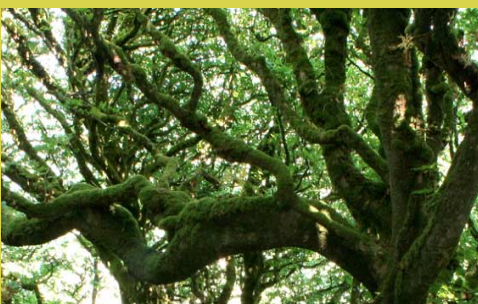


Image courtesy of Robbie Murphy

Moss likes to grow in damp, shady conditions. In the northern hemisphere, moss will **MOST LIKELY** grow on the northern side of trees. This is because the northern side of trees get less sun and doesn't dry out as quickly. In the southern hemisphere the opposite is the case. There, with the sun shining from the opposite direction, moss will most likely grow on the south side of trees.

This however is only a general rule and there can be many reasons why moss will be grow on a particular side of a tree. For example, the whole tree could be in shade, so providing damp conditions for moss to grow. If you are using moss on a tree to find your bearings in a forest, remember to consider others factors.