

IMPORTANCE OF FUNGI

Fungi are of great economic importance

Recycling

Fungi, together with bacteria, are responsible for most of the recycling which returns dead material to the soil in a form in which it can be reused. Without fungi, earth would have been covered under piles of dead plant and animal remains.

Mycorrhizae and plant growth

Fungi are vitally important for the good growth of most plants, including crops, through the development of the mycorrhizal association. This association enables continued supply of food to all life since plants exist at the base of most food chains.

Food

Fungi are also important directly as food for humans. Many mushrooms are edible and different species are cultivated for sale worldwide. Fungi are also widely used in the production of many foods and drinks. These include cheeses, beer, wine and bread

Medicines

The antibiotic drug, penicillin is derived from a common fungus called *Penicillium*. Many other fungi also produce antibiotic substances, which are now widely used to control diseases in human and animal populations.

A fungus which parasitizes Rye crops causes a disease known as Ergot. It produces small hard structures, known as sclerotia. These sclerotia can cause poisoning in humans and animals which have eaten infected material but are the source of a powerful and important drug is used during childbirth.

Biocontrol

The spores of the fungi are sprayed on the crop pests such as insects (entomophagous) and nematodes (Nematophagous). This method is generally cheaper and less damaging to the environment than using chemical pesticides.

Crop Diseases

Fungi cause various diseases on crop resulting to reduced yield. Some fungi are parasites of plants. Most of our common crop plants are susceptible to fungal attack of one kind or another. An entire field can be lost to fungal attack if not treated with anti fungal agents (fungicides)

Animal Disease

Fungi can also parasitize domestic animals causing diseases. Fungi also live on and in humans. Athletes foot and candida infections are frequently occurring diseases of human caused by fungi

Food Spoilage

Fungi play a major role in food spoilage. Large losses of stored food with high moisture content are lost to fungi. This occurs more in the tropics. Moulds render infected stored foods inedible.