

NEEDLE FUNGUS

- ▶ **Height:** 3-6in
- ▶ **Classification:** Fungus
- ▶ **Substrate:** Pompayus rhizoids



The needle fungus grows in the root-like rhizoids of a particular Family of rugplants called the pompayus. Its fruiting body develops needles that catch onto the skin, feathers, or fur of animals, and causes discomfort or pain. This is what the needle fungus is best known for.



This is a small fungus that grows in symbiosis with the pompayus rugplant. The diminutive nature of its symbiotic partner has prompted this fungus to develop a tall fruiting body to help it disperse its spores.

The fruiting body itself is a combination of green and red.

Reproduction

The cap of this mushroom is covered with waxy barbs. At the opposite end of each barb, buried deep inside the mushroom itself, is a single spore. If an animal happens by and is caught by a barb, it pulls the barb free and the spore comes with it. The barb is lightly poisoned with a harmless yet painful toxin, so animals tend to be in a hurry to remove the barb.

Medical Conditions

There are no known diseases of the needle fungus.

Its barbs produce a toxin that can be anything from mildly uncomfortable to moderately painful. Some individuals may have an allergic reaction to it, but for most people it is merely uncomfortable.



Geographical Distribution



This fungus' range is equatorial, and is dependant on the presence of the pompayus rugplant.

Populations

Because of its reliance on a Family of rugplants, the needle fungus only grows in areas moist enough to keep a rugplant alive. In practice this means it is usually found on or near forest floors.

Position in Ecosystem

Needle fungus are little more than an irritant. They're unpleasant for all but small invertebrates to eat.

Pompayus

The needle fungus has a symbiotic relationship with this rugplant, but it is unknown whether it benefits the rugplant or whether it is a harmful or harmless parasite.

Technology

Needle fungi contribute nothing to the technological advancement of Kaleida, nor its offworlders.

Agriculture

Needle fungi are undesirable as a food item, so are unlikely ever to be farmed.

Language

[I'll come back to this when I write a conlang.]

Energy Usage

This fungus may draw its energy from the pompayus plant, or it may do so from the substrate that both organisms grow on.

Sanitation

'Sanitation' may not be quite the word for dealing with a needle fungus; they do not infect animals, only latch on temporarily to disperse their spores.

History

There is no significant history relating to the needle fungus.

Evolution / Genesis

Researchers currently have no information about this fungus' evolution, neither is there any information in Kaleidian folklore beyond a cautionary tale called *The Three Nesters*.



The general irrelevance of needle fungi to the day to day life of sapients, coupled with its unpleasant sting, have earned it an image of mild disdain among Kaleidian sapients.

Food

The needle fungus can be cooked and eaten safely, as cooking softens it and destroys the mechanism that stings passersby, but it is also a very small mushroom, so collecting it is unpleasant, arduous, and not considered worthwhile. Those who have eaten it report that its flavour is unremarkable.

Art

This fungus features in a folk tale called "The Three Nesters." In the story, two kasulam and one mukash nestling who are friends explore the woods for the first time. They find a number of hazards and bounties; the needle fungus is a harmless though unpleasant hazard (but one the youngsters have to remind themselves not to scream or shout about as loud noises can attract predators). The Piassijada plant (also known as the grasping carpet) is a boon that they encounter as it can be lifted up to reveal lots of edible invertebrates underneath.

Social Dynamics

Occasionally a gatherer may return home with some needle fungus spores stuck in their skin, and require help removing them. This is one minor reason that friendships are so important in Kaleidian communities.

Politics

This fungus isn't dangerous enough to warrant any sort of political action. Leaders don't consider needle fungus something worth removing from their environment, and most Kaleidians are content to have areas with needle fungus as part of their territories.

Utopian / Dystopian Qualities

Needle fungus aren't painful or dangerous enough to most characters in the Kaleidian universe to warrant a description of 'dystopian'. They're almost invariably just an annoyance, except for a very few who are allergic.

Economy

Needle fungus have little or nothing to offer as a product.

Education

The only education provided between Kaleidians about this fungus is in the folk tale *The Three Nesters*, which warns youngsters of some of the dangers and opportunities they might discover in the woods. The story warns listeners not to scream or cry if they get stung by a needle fungus so that they don't attract a predator.

Healthcare and Medicine

Some shamans can treat needle fungus stings, which generally present as a rash or hives. The spore and its hook are too small and fiddly to do with their fingers, so the treatment is generally to leave the stings alone for around 10 minutes before cleaning them with a layer of hilsuny wax or any soapy plants that the shaman has to hand.

Shelter

To stretch the definition of 'shelter', needle fungus grow in the sheltered parts of woodlands so can be seen as an annoying feature of the woods for those who might otherwise consider the woods a safe and sheltered place to be.

Credits

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy