

Mosses & Liverworts

Tamarisk Moss *Thuidium tamariscinum*
Marsh Hair Moss *Polytrichum commune*
Mousetail Moss *Isoetes myosuroides*
Sphagnum Moss *Sphagnum* spp.

Mosses and liverworts, collectively known as bryophytes, are primitive or 'lower' plants. They do not produce flowers as such and reproduce by the production of spores instead. Like the ferns, they tend to be delicate in structure and therefore thrive best in humid, damp and often shady conditions. In addition to growing on the soil like most other plants, mosses and liverworts often grow on other plants as epiphytes, e.g. on tree trunks and on rocks.



They are slow growing and are present all year round. Although they all seem very similar at a glance, close inspection with a hand lens or magnifying glass reveals a great variety of structures and shapes. Spores are produced by most species each year, either in the spring or autumn – this varies with species. The spores are produced in a capsule borne on a long slender stalk that arises from the green part of the moss. The tamarisk, mousetail and marsh hair mosses are all common components of the woodland environment, often providing a seed bed for the germination of other woodland plants. Sphagnum moss is the most important component of our peat bogs. Each sphagnum moss cell is capable of holding about 30 times its own weight in water – squeeze some



out and see! This is extremely important in maintaining wet conditions in our bogs. In addition, sphagnums gather important nutrients from their environment by actively pumping out hydrogen ions into the soil around them, and this helps to promote the acidity of the bog environment. Mosses were much used in the past, and have been found in archaeological remains next to latrines, where they were obviously used like a kind of toilet paper! Their antiseptic qualities were also put to use in the trenches during World War I, where sphagnum in particular was a favoured dressing for wounds.