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SOLF Presents: The Tiny World of Lichens - My Southborough

Beth Melo

2-3 minutes

*Above: SOLF encourages a closer look at a “mini ecosystem” under our noses.
(images cropped from photo contributed by SOLF Trustee Deborah Costine)*

[This post is part of a special guest series focused on appreciating nature in Southborough, contributed by the [Southborough Open Land Foundation](#) (SOLF), a non-profit dedicated to preserving and stewarding natural resources here in town.]

Chances are you could not walk far from your home without encountering lichens. (except you might not notice them) They can grow on just about anything; rocks, trees, fenceposts and even glass. Lichens are a mini ecosystem made up of Algae and Fungi. The fungi provide the structure and the algae provide food through photosynthesis.

There are 3 kinds of lichens: crustose, foliose and fruticose.

Crustose lichens are “crusty” and flat. Foliose, like “foliage,” has a somewhat leafy appearance and Fruticose can appear a bit “shrubby.”

Southborough’s Rural Cemetery has all three kinds, since lichens like stones. In my ramble through the cemetery the other day I found mostly crustose, a small amount of foliose and very little fruticose, although I didn’t look up into the trees. Lichens can make the words on a stone difficult to read, but there is some debate as to whether or not they do actual harm. One source, enviroliteracy.org, suggests that over time lichens on stones can create “micro fissures.” In general it is believed that since lichens get all their nutrients from photosynthesis through their algae component, they cause no harm to their host.

Up close, lichens are amazing little worlds to examine and study.

Below are examples of Crustose, Foliose and Fruticose. (*Click on thumbnails for a closer look.*)



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Debbie Costine, is a SOLF Trustee, artist and curious naturalist

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