

# Slime Santa beard likes hot peppers

December 17 2019, by Alice Scott

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A slime Santa beard has been made by Ian Hands-Portman at the University of Warwick using slime molds, a myxomycete which is a single giant cell with multiple nuclei that lives in dark damp places and likes to feed off bacteria and fungi and things that have started to decay.

Slime Santa's beard can be seen growing over a 2-day time lapse, the slime mold isn't a plant, animal or a fungi, it's a myxomycete, coming from the Greek mxyo = slime and mycete = mold.

They start off as a single cell and keep in growing, most only grow to a centimetre, but some can grow to over a meter even though they are still a single cell, this is because this type is called a 'acellular [slime](#) mold' - a [single cell](#) containing millions of nuclei.

You'll find [slime molds](#) in dark damp places, like woods or forests, you just need to look under logs, fallen leaves and woodchip piles as they don't like light.

In the wood they'll feed off bacteria and fungi, but in the lab they are fed oats, and you can try to feed them different foods. Researchers at the School of Life Sciences at the University of Warwick have found that they like really hot peppers, but not chocolate.

Slime molds are useful to scientists in many ways, for example, the way it controls how its nuclei all divide at the same time is something that cancer researchers are interested in.

Computer Scientists are also interested in Slime Molds to understand how it solves mazes and maps, as although it's slower than computers they are much more efficient, meaning it could lead to faster, lower energy computers and sat-navs.

Slime mold were first discovered thousands of years ago, however they were only properly described 140 years ago. In 2000 a team of Japanese scientists discovered it could solve mazes, and since other scientists have shown they can learn to do simple maths.

Ian Hands-Portman from the School of Life Sciences at the University of Warwick comments:

"Slime molds are weird and wonderful in the world of science, there around a thousand species, some tiny and some a few meters across coming in all different colours from yellow to bright pink or red.

"Having kept them for ten years you can learn so much about them, from what food they like, to the ability to grow them in all shapes and sizes you want—such as Santa's slimey beard!"

Provided by University of Warwick

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