

THE PLANT KINGDOM

There are near four hundred thousand species of plants in the world classified into four major groups. The largest of these is **angiosperms**. Angiosperms is by far the largest group with around three hundred and fifty thousand species in some 14000 genera and 416 families. Angiosperms are flowering plants with an ovule encasing its seed. They are vascular, that is have a system that enables them to draw and transport water and essential minerals and nutrients from the ground and for distribution throughout the plant.

Gymnosperms are similar to angiosperms in that they are also vascular. The key difference however is that it does not have an ovule. Rather, seed is externally fixed to an appendage or growth such as a cone. Pines and conifers are common examples of gymnosperms. Gymnosperms are the smallest of the major plant groups with around 4650 species in 88 genera and twelve families.

Pteridophytes is the plant group covering ferns. They too are vascular and have leaves but differ from angiosperms and gymnosperms in that reproduction is by way of spores rather than flower and seed. There are about 14000 species in this group in 587 genera and 48 families.

The fourth plant group is **Brophytes**. Brophytes are mosses and liverworts. It is the second largest plant group with about twenty thousand species in 1822 genera and 177 families. Brophytes play a vital role in regulating ecosystems on which other plants depend. They promote soil health with plants benefiting from their role in water retention and fixing nutrients into soil.

	Angiosperms	Gymnosperms	Pteridophytes	Brophytes
Families	416	12	48	177
Genera	14000	88	587	1822
Species	352000	4651	13000	20000