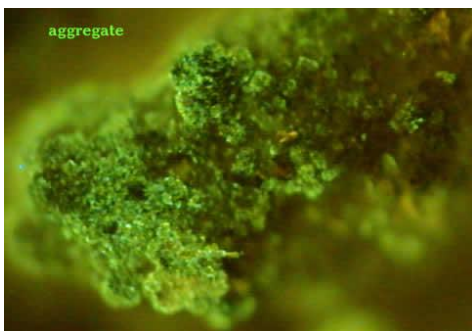
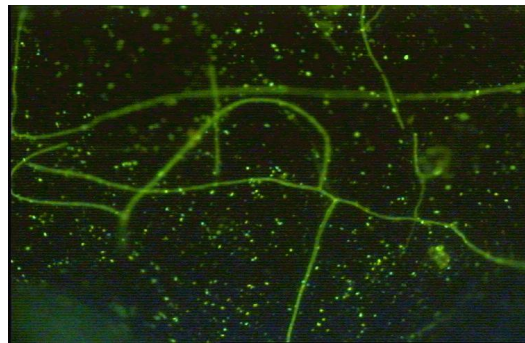
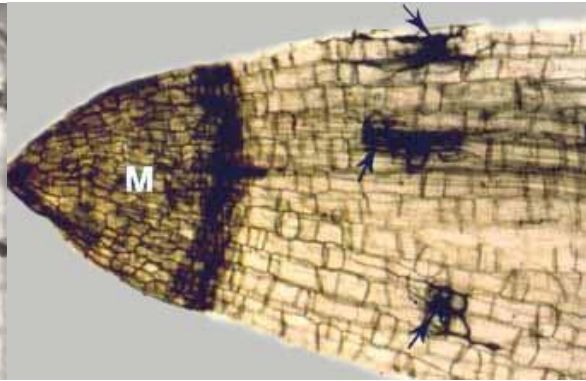
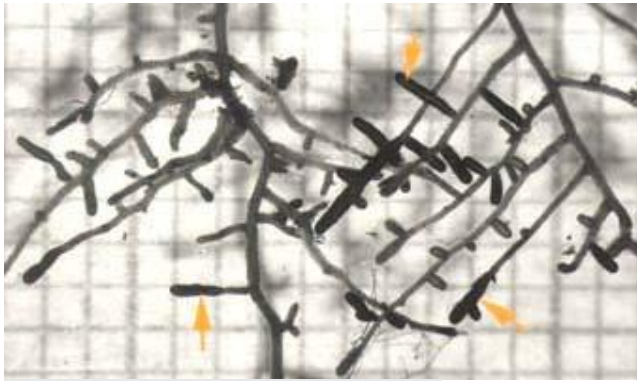


Fungi in the Garden



Most people think of fungi as mushrooms but mushrooms are only the fruiting body that happens above ground every once in a while. Most of the fungus exists as tiny filaments in the earth extending great distances. Many of these filaments have close associations with plant roots. These are called mycorrhizae and some of them attach to the end of root hairs as capsules like the birch tree at the bottom left or they actually grow into the root like the photo on the right and the one on the next row to the left. These filaments extend the reach of the root system and are very good at capturing nutrients and passing them on to the plant. In turn, the plant passes its sugars on to the fungus. These relationships usually involve a specific species of fungus with a specific species of plant.



As important, is the role that the filaments play in soil structure. In 1996 Dr. Sara Wright discovered that the surface of the filaments were coated with glomalin that she could stain with a fluorescent green die. This sticky substance remains in the soil after the filaments die. There, it holds particles together creating structure that is responsible for much of the soil's tilth.

