

Nat Theo Club

FIELD NOTES

ISSUE #50



Old Man's Beard

LICHEN

HABITAT

Grows like tassels on tree trunks and branches. Intolerant to pollution, so it grows in forests with clean air. In North America it is found on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts and around the great lakes.

FUN FACT

There is a common misunderstanding that says Old Man's Beard only grows on the north-facing sides of trees and thus can be helpful for navigation. While this lichen often grows on north-facing trees in open forests because they receive more shade, it can be found on all sides of trees in closed-canopy forests with more moisture.



HAVE YOU SEEN A TREE WITH A BEARD?

The other day, my cat, Fischer, jumped on the floor, chasing after something. This caught my attention because he is not usually a playful cat. I wondered what had sparked his interest. It wasn't a toy or a piece of string, but instead, a clump of old man's beard lichen left over from the live Christmas tree we cut down from the forest and brought home. Fischer found this tassel-like clump of lichen a perfect toy.

Old man's beard lichen decorates trees in forests in Western Europe and North America. Like most lichens, it is intolerant to pollution. Lichen are part fungi and part algae, and air pollution can overwhelm their natural processes and cause them to die. If you find a forest with lots of old man's beard hanging off the trees, it's a sign that the air in the forest is healthy. Old man's beard lichen should not be confused with a type of climbing plant sometimes called old man's beard that can be invasive and harm trees and forests.



Old man's beard lichen is helpful and a sign of a healthy forest.



Old man's beard plant is pretty, but invasive and can harm a forest.

Just as air pollution kills off old man's beard lichen, pollution can harm us, too. Not only pollution in the air outside but pollution in our thoughts or what we read, watch, or listen to. As clean air is important for lichen, clean media is important for us. Philippians 4:8 says, "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise." Let's be careful about what we allow into our minds and spend time in Scripture and creation to avoid pollutive thoughts.

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