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Sphagnum

Sphagnaceae

Sphagnum is derived from Latin *sphagnos* (kind of moss).

Any of the *Sphagnum* species can absorb evenly more than twice as much moisture as cotton and sixteen times their own weight in liquid.

These absorbent and also antibiotic qualities have been employed for centuries (at least as far back as 1900 BC, the beginning of the Bronze Age) by North American Indians, the Inuit peoples, the Kashmiri peoples and the Laplanders for dressing wounds. Records exist of Scottish soldiers using the moss to staunch their wounds during the battle of Clontarf in 1014 (described in an entry in the *Gaelic Chronicle*) and further evidence of its use appears again in 1513 when the Scots were beaten by the English at Flodden. It is understood however that orthodox Western medicine was oblivious to the moss's attributes until they were accidentally identified in the early 1880s in Germany. Following this 'discovery' the moss was used to stem soldiers' bleeding wounds in the 1st and 2nd World Wars in the 20th Century and this led in turn to a short-term industry for its collection in the localities where it grew.

The Laplanders laid dried moss in babies' cradles as a mattress and covering which according to an old writer kept the child 'remarkable clean, dry and warm'. Dried moss has also been used in other countries as stable litter.

In the last 100-150 years sphagnum moss has been combined with peat fibre as a rooting medium for orchids.

Animals are aware of the moss's virtues. Deer have been known to drag themselves to beds of it when wounded.