



# Rentokil

The experts in property care

Produced by Research & Development

INFORMATION LEAFLET

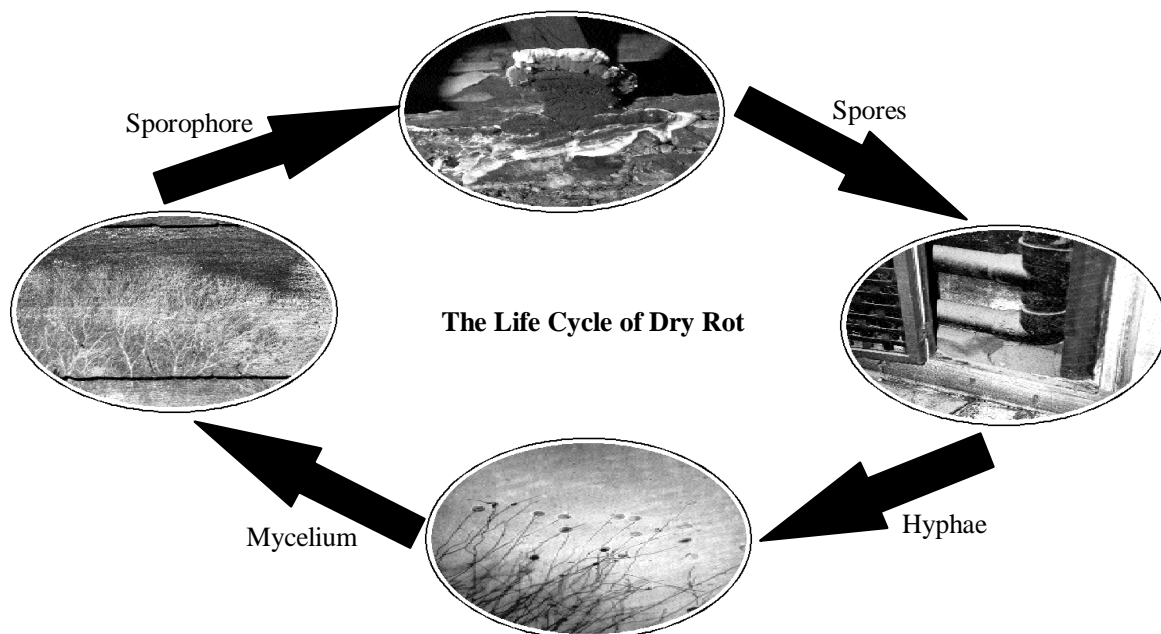
Number 6

## DRY ROT

The **dry rot** fungus, *Serpula lacrymans*, is an important species of wood-destroying fungus, related to mushrooms, toadstools and bracket fungi. Like them, it produces a large fruiting body, which releases millions of spores. If these germinate they produce microscopic threads (hyphae) which elongate and entwine to form the vegetative part of the fungus (mycelium) and ultimately the fruiting body (sporophore).

Where building timbers are subject to damp and badly ventilated conditions, or where they are in contact with damp masonry, *S. lacrymans* can cause serious damage and decay. Wood attacked by dry rot is gradually destroyed by enzymes produced by the fungus. Numerous deep cracks appear which break the wood into characteristic cuboidal pieces.

In damp, dark places, soft, white cushions or silky tassels of fungal mycelium may grow on the surface of the wood. Small “tears” or drops of water may also be visible on the fungal growth. In drier places, surface growths are less common. They generally amount to little more than silvery-grey skins over the timber, with small areas tinged lemon-yellow or lilac.



Dry rot presents a serious problem when it attacks timber in buildings. Most wet rots are restricted to the timber on which they feed and cannot penetrate brickwork. However, *S. lacrymans* produces bundles of hyphae called “strands” which are capable of growing over and through non-woody substances to other timber. Dry rot is therefore more difficult to eradicate than most other fungi.

*S. lacrymans* will attack softwoods or hardwoods. It is also capable of growing on damp cardboard, straw and other vegetable matter and can survive for months inside materials on which it cannot feed. It is most prevalent in the north and west of Britain.

### Characteristics of dry rot

- Mycelium (growing body) : Extensive, soft, white cushions form in still, humid conditions. Silver-grey, skin-like growths form in drier conditions. Both types may have lemon-yellow and/or lilac tinges.
- Strands : Up to 8mm thick. Greyish-white in colour. Brittle when dry. Can penetrate plaster or brickwork.
- Sporophore (fruiting body) : Variable in size, usually a fleshy plate with shallow pores or folds. Grey at first with white margins and lilac tinges. Later, centre turns orange, then rust-red in colour.
- Spores : Individual spores are 0.01mm long and orange-yellow. In bulk, spores are rust-red.
- Rot caused : Crumbling, brown rot; large, cuboidal cracks form. Decayed wood is powdery when dry.
- Timber attacked : Softwoods or hardwoods. Also grows on damp paper, cardboard and carpets. Damage to chipboard is usually severe.
- Temperature requirements : Optimum 22°C. Range tolerated 5-26°C.
- Moisture requirements : Optimum 30-40% of the dry weight of timber. Range tolerated 20-80% of the dry weight of timber.
- Importance : Most common in the north and west of Britain and in built-up areas.