

Irregular Plurals

Most English nouns are made plural by adding **-s** or **-es** to the singular form. However there are many exceptions. The following table lists singular and plural forms of words that are exceptions to the general rule.

The definitions given in the glossary are very brief and incomplete. In the table is an alphabetized list of general terms, many of which are also used in science. In fact, the vast majority of irregular plurals are derived from Latin, the common scientific language when the discipline of Biology first arose. Like many languages, Latin has genders for nouns. Latin has three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. Most Latin masculine nouns end in **-us** and are pluralized **-i** (cactus/cacti); most feminine nouns end in **-a** and are pluralized **-ae** (alga/algae); and most neuter nouns end in **-um** and take the plural ending **-a** (agendum/agenda). These three rules will help you understand most of the English exceptions. However, some of the nouns are derived from Greek or other languages, some English nouns have no logical plurals, and some other nouns are uncountable and have no plural form.

Regularizing or anglicizing plurals, by forcing an **-s** or **-es** onto many singular nouns, often causes awkward pronunciations. Adding **-s** or **-es** to already plural nouns is simply wrong. Adding Latin plural endings to non-Latin words is also wrong.

Table 1 General Words

Singular	Correct Plural	Acceptable Plural	Definition and Comments
agendum	agenda	agendas	item for discussion
apex	apices		uppermost point , narrowed to a point
aquarium	aquaria	aquariums	water-filled tank for aquatic organisms
axis	axes		straight line about which a body could rotate
cactus	cacti	cactuses	succulent dicot plants adapted for arid regions with greatly modified leaves; members of the family Cactaceae
corpus	corpora	corpuses	body of an organism; a collection (body) of writings
datum	data		piece of information

fish	fish	fishes (when concerning several species)	aquatic vertebrate without limbs
fauna	faunae	faunas	collective term for animals in an area
flora	florae	floras	collective term for plants in an area
foot	feet		terminal end of a leg, especially for non-humans
formula	formulae	formulas	symbolic representation of an element or compound
forum	fora	forums	a place of meeting, often for debates
fruit	fruit	fruits (when concerning several kinds or species)	mature ovary containing seeds
goose	geese		large aquatic birds related to ducks
leaf	leaves		flattened or needle-like plant structure; primary site of photosynthesis
maximum	maxima	maximums	the largest of a group of values
minimum	minima	minimums	the smallest of a group of values
mongoose	mongeese	mongooses	ferret-sized mammal of Asia and Africa that feeds on snakes and rodents
moose	moose		large species of the deer family
mouse	mice		small rodents especially of the genus <i>Mus</i>
sheep	sheep		ruminant mammals especially of the genus <i>Ovis</i>
stimulus	stimuli		something that encourages a process to initiate or develop
tooth	teeth		feeding structure typical of vertebrate mouths; also for serrated structures of other organisms
virus	viri	viruses	non-cellular parasite of cells

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