A FIELD GUIDE FOR WALKERS · TEMPERATE WOODS AND GRASSLANDS

The Mushroom Spotter

A beginner's field guide to common fungi. Forty eight fungi to find, how to read them, which ones end up in the kitchen, and the handful that can kill you.







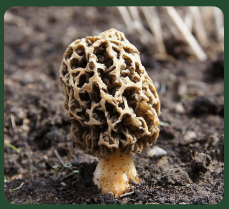



PHOTO EDITION, 2026 LOOK CLOSELY. TAKE NOTES. LEAVE IT WHERE IT GROWS.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Written to be read on a walk

This is a spotter's guide: a book for noticing, naming and recording the fungi you pass on a Sunday walk. It covers forty eight species that a beginner in the temperate world is likely to meet or to hear about, chosen because they are common, because they are striking, because they are famous in the kitchen, or because knowing them keeps you safe.

Every entry follows the same pattern: a photograph, what the cap looks like, what is underneath it, what the stem and base are doing, where and when to look, what it can be confused with, and one practical tip that experienced spotters use in the field. Species that are eaten somewhere in the world carry a Culinary tag with a line on how they are used, from the supermarket button mushroom to the black truffle.

The species are grouped by shape rather than by family, because shape is what you see first, with a final group for the culinary classics. Every entry in the contents is a link, and so is every page number in the text, so the guide works as well on a phone as on paper.

A word on eating

Each species carries a status label: deadly, poisonous, handle with care, eaten by experts, or not for the pot. The Culinary tag tells you that a species is enjoyed somewhere, by people who know exactly what they have picked or who bought it from a grower. Neither label is a recommendation. Nothing in a book of this size is enough to make a mushroom safe to eat, and the author accepts no responsibility for anyone who treats it as if it were. Read the safety page before you read anything else.

The Mushroom Spotter · Photo edition, 2026 · Original text. Photographs are by the contributors credited on each page and on the credits page at the back, and are used under their Creative Commons or public domain licences. Species names follow common usage; Latin names change from time to time as fungi are reclassified. Seasons are given for the temperate Northern Hemisphere; shift them by six months south of the equator.

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Six rules that keep spotters safe

This is a spotting guide, not a foraging guide.
Nothing in these pages is enough to decide that a mushroom is safe to eat. Treat the status and culinary labels as background knowledge about each species, not as permission.

Never eat anything you cannot name with certainty.
That means the species, not the family, and it means having ruled out every lookalike, including the ones that only an expert can separate.

Dig, do not pick, when checking an identity.
The base of the stem (sac, bulb, bands, bootlaces) is where the deadly species give themselves away.

Handling is fine; eating is not.
No fungus in this guide is dangerous to touch. Wash your hands before eating your sandwiches, and keep small children from putting pieces in their mouths.

Follow the local code.
Take photographs, not fungi, in nature reserves and protected sites. Elsewhere, pick sparingly, never uproot the mycelium, and leave plenty for wildlife and spores.

If someone has eaten a wild mushroom and feels unwell, get medical help the same day.
Call your local emergency number or poison information centre, and keep a sample of what was eaten. Symptoms from the deadliest species can take 6 to 24 hours to appear.

What you are actually looking at

A mushroom is not the fungus. It is the fruit, the part sent up for a few days to scatter spores, in the same way that an apple is not the tree.

The organism itself is a web of fine threads called the mycelium, spread through soil, leaf litter or dead wood, sometimes across an area the size of a football pitch and sometimes for centuries. It is there all year. The fruit bodies appear when conditions are right, which in most temperate regions means warm, damp weather from late summer into early winter, with a smaller flush in spring.

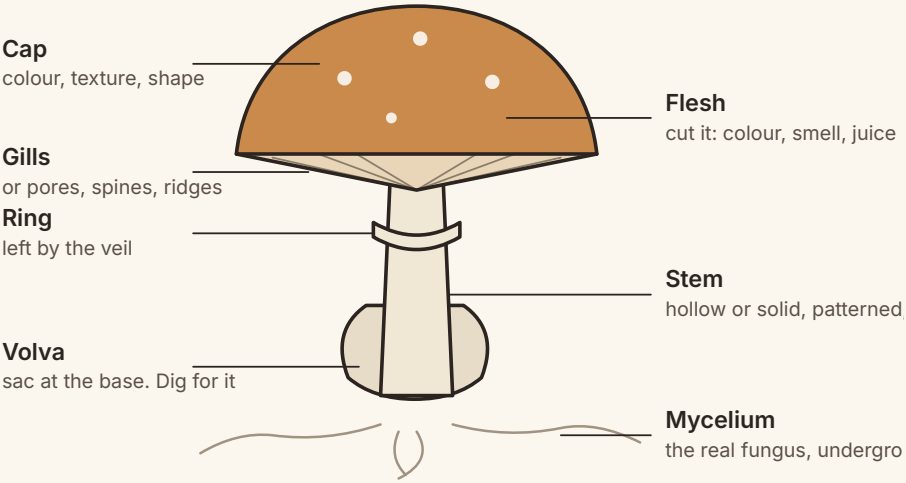
Fungi make a living in three ways, and knowing which is which tells you where to look. **Saprotrophs** feed on dead material: stumps, fallen branches, leaf litter, dung. **Mycorrhizal** species live in partnership with the roots of living trees, trading minerals for sugars, which is why the Penny Bun turns up under oak and beech and the Fly Agaric under birch. **Parasites** such as Honey Fungus feed on living trees and may eventually kill them.

How to use the species pages

Each page has a photograph, a status label, a Culinary tag where one applies, a strip showing the months the species usually fruits (dark squares), a spore print colour, and seven short fields. The **Lookalikes** field is the most important one on the page: it tells you what else could be in your hand. The **Spotter's tip** is the one field test that settles it.

The **group pages** gather species by shape, and the pages at the back give the deadly species at a glance, the culinary ones at a glance, the trees to search under, a month by month calendar, a log to fill in, and a glossary for any word that is new.

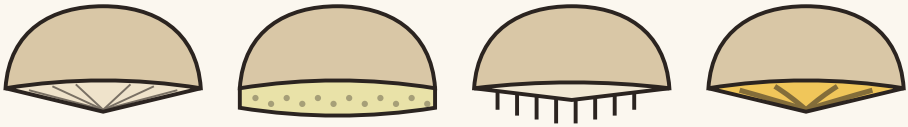
Eight things to check, every time



Cap	Shape, colour, texture (dry, sticky, scaly), and whether it has a central bump or dip.
Underside	Gills, pores, spines or ridges? Note colour, spacing, and whether they reach or run down the stem.
Ring	A skirt left by the veil that covered the gills. Present, absent, movable, fragile?
Stem	Length, shape, colour, patterning, hollow or solid, and how it bruises.
Base and volva	A sac, a bulb, scaly bands, or nothing. Dig it out whole to see.
Flesh	Cut it: colour change, smell, any liquid, texture.
Habitat	Which tree, what soil, grass or wood, alone or in troops.
Spore print	The colour of the spore dust settles more arguments than anything else.

Underneath the cap

Turn it over first. The spore bearing surface comes in four main forms, and the form alone rules out most of this book.



Gills Pores Spines Ridges

Taking a spore print

The colour of a mushroom's spores is fixed for the species and is often the quickest way to separate two lookalikes. It takes a few hours and no equipment.

1. **Cut the stem off**
   Remove the stem flush with the gills so the cap sits flat.
2. **Lay the cap face down**
   Half on white paper, half on black, so a pale or dark print both show.
3. **Cover it**
   Put a glass or bowl over the cap to stop draughts. Add a drop of water on top if the cap is dry.
4. **Wait**
   Two to eight hours, sometimes overnight. Lift the cap straight up.
5. **Read the colour**
   White, cream, pink, brown, rusty, purple brown or black. Compare with the species pages.

Start with the shape

Decide which of these your find belongs to, then turn to that group's pages. The groups are practical, not scientific, and the last one is about the kitchen rather than the woods.



Gilled caps of grassland

Lawns, meadows, pasture and parks. Look for rings, scales, bruising and the colour of the gills, which changes as the mushroom ages.

Page 10 →



Gilled caps of woodland

Under trees, on leaf litter and on stumps. This is where the most dangerous species live, so the stem base matters more than anything.

Page 17 →



Boletes, the caps with pores

Sponge like pores under the cap instead of gills. Most are chunky, many bruise blue, and one of them is the most prized wild mushroom in the world.

Page 28 →



Brackets on wood

Shelves and tiers growing straight out of trunks and logs. No stem, usually tough, often there for months.

Page 31 →



Puffballs, earthballs and stinkhorns

Round, odd and unmistakable once you know them. Cut one open and the inside tells you what it is.

Page 37 →



Funnels, spines, cups, jellies and clubs

The shapes that fit nowhere else. Some of the most beautiful finds of the year are in this group.

Page 42 →



The culinary classics

The mushrooms you meet in a kitchen or a market, from cultivated staples to the great foraged luxuries. Many species in the earlier groups are culinary too; look for the Culinary tag.

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GROUP

Gilled caps of grassland

Lawns, meadows, pasture and parks. Look for rings, scales, bruising and the colour of the gills, which changes as the mushroom ages.









IN THIS GROUP

Field Mushroom	11	Shaggy Inkcap	14
Yellow Stainer	12	Fairy Ring Champignon	15
Parasol	13	Waxcaps	16



Photo: Wikimedia Commons contributor · CC BY-SA 3.0

GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

Field Mushroom

Agaricus campestris

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 4 to 10 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D ·

Spores chocolate brown

CAP OR BODY	Smooth, creamy white, sometimes with fine silky fibres. Starts as a button and flattens with age.
UNDERSIDE	Gills start pale pink, then turn deep chocolate brown as spores ripen. Never white.
STEM AND BASE	Short, white, with a thin single ring that often wears away. No sac at the base.
WHERE	Grazed pasture, horse paddocks, lawns and parks. Always in grass, never under trees.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Yellow Stainer (stains chrome yellow at the stem base and smells of ink). Destroying Angel and other white Amanitas (white gills, sac at the base), which can be deadly.
CULINARY	The wild cousin of the shop mushroom; foraged and fried the same day.

Spotter's tip. Rub the base of the stem with a thumb and wait a minute. Any bright yellow stain means put it down.



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GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

POISONOUS

Yellow Stainer

Agaricus xanthodermus

Cap 6 to 15 cm · to 15 cm tall · J F M A M J **J A S O N** D ·

Spores chocolate brown

CAP OR BODY	White, often with a slightly flattened or boxy top when young. Can look greyish in the centre.
UNDERSIDE	Gills pale, then pink, then grey brown, very like the Field Mushroom.
STEM AND BASE	White with a ring. The giveaway: the very base of the stem turns bright chrome yellow when cut or bruised.
WHERE	Lawns, parks, hedgerows and woodland edges, often in groups or rings.
WHEN	July to November.
LOOKALIKES	Field Mushroom and Horse Mushroom. Both lack the strong yellow staining at the base and smell pleasantly mushroomy.

Spotter's tip. Smell it. A Yellow Stainer smells of ink or hospital disinfectant, and the smell gets stronger when it is cooked, not weaker.



Photo: Holger Krisp · CC BY 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

Parasol

Macrolepiota procera

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 10 to 25 cm · to 30 cm tall · J F M A M J **J A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Starts as a drumstick on a tall stem, then opens into a huge umbrella with a central bump and shaggy brown scales.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white to cream, crowded, free from the stem.
STEM AND BASE	Tall and slender with a snakeskin pattern of brown bands. A thick double ring slides freely up and down.
WHERE	Grassy woodland edges, meadows, dunes and roadside verges.
WHEN	July to November.
LOOKALIKES	Shaggy Parasol (shorter, no snakeskin stem, flesh turns reddish when cut, upsets some stomachs). Small Lepiota species can be deadly; anything under 10 cm across should be left alone.
CULINARY	Foraged; the whole cap is dipped in egg and breadcrumbs and fried like a schnitzel.

Spotter's tip. The movable ring is the classic test. If you can slide it along the stem like a bangle, you are looking at a true Parasol.



Photo: Bigredwine1 · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

Shaggy Inkcap

Coprinus comatus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 5 to 15 cm tall · to 30 cm tall · J F M A **M J J A S O N** D ·

Spores black

CAP OR BODY	A tall white cylinder covered in shaggy, upturned scales, hence the old name Lawyer's Wig. The edge turns pink, then black, and drips away as ink.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white, then pink, then dissolving into black liquid from the bottom up.
STEM AND BASE	White, hollow, straight, with a small loose ring.
WHERE	Roadside verges, lawns, disturbed ground and rubbish tips, often in lines or groups.
WHEN	May to November.
LOOKALIKES	Common Inkcap (smooth grey brown cap, no shaggy scales, causes a nasty reaction with alcohol). Magpie Inkcap (black and white patches).
CULINARY	Foraged young and cooked within hours, before it turns to ink.

Spotter's tip. Come back the next day. A Shaggy Inkcap you spotted in the morning may be a black puddle by evening, so it is a good one to photograph in stages.



Photo: Alan Rockefeller · CC BY 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Fairy Ring Champignon

Marasmius oreades

Cap 2 to 5 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A **M J J A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Tan to buff with a distinct central bump, drying paler. Often looks leathery.
UNDERSIDE	Gills cream, widely spaced and attached to the stem.
STEM AND BASE	Thin, tough and fibrous; you can twist it without it snapping.
WHERE	Lawns, playing fields and short grass, growing in rings or arcs that may be decades old.
WHEN	May to November.
LOOKALIKES	Fool's Funnel (Clitocybe rivulosa) grows in the same rings and is seriously poisonous: whiter, with crowded gills running down the stem and a brittle stem.
CULINARY	Foraged in small numbers; dries well and revives in soups.

Spotter's tip. The ring in the grass is darker green because the fungus feeds the soil. Measure its diameter; a ring grows roughly 10 to 20 cm a year.



Photo: Holger Krisp · CC BY 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF GRASSLAND

NOT FOR THE POT

Waxcaps

Hygrocybe species

Cap 1 to 6 cm · to 10 cm tall · J F M A M J J A **S O N D** · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Small, bright, and waxy or greasy to the touch: scarlet, orange, golden yellow, parrot green or snow white depending on the species.
UNDERSIDE	Thick, widely spaced, waxy gills in the same bright colour.
STEM AND BASE	Slender, often coloured, sometimes slimy.
WHERE	Old, unfertilised grassland: churchyards, lawns that have never been treated, hill pasture.
WHEN	September to December.
LOOKALIKES	Each other; there are dozens of species. For spotting purposes, the group is the find.

Spotter's tip. A lawn with several waxcap colours is a sign of ancient grassland. Record it and tell the landowner; these sites are rare and worth protecting.

GROUP

Gilled caps of woodland

Under trees, on leaf litter and on stumps. This is where the most dangerous species live, so the stem base matters more than anything.









IN THIS GROUP

Fly Agaric	18	Honey Fungus	23
Death Cap	19	Sulphur Tuft	24
Destroying Angel	20	Funeral Bell	25
Amethyst Deceiver	21	Brown Rollrim	26
Wood Blewit	22	Velvet Shank	27



Photo: Kieran Roy Powell · CC BY 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

POISONOUS

Fly Agaric

Amanita muscaria

Cap 8 to 20 cm · to 25 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · Spores white

CAP OR BODY	The storybook toadstool: glossy scarlet with white warty flakes, which rain can wash off. Fades to orange with age.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white, crowded, free from the stem.
STEM AND BASE	White, with a skirt like ring and a bulbous base ringed with scaly bands.
WHERE	Under birch and pine, on acid soils. Often in large troops.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Washed out specimens can be mistaken for the Blusher or Panther Cap. The base of the stem settles it.

Spotter's tip. Look at the base. The ridged, scaly bulb is the fingerprint of the Amanita family, the group that includes most of the world's deadliest species.



Photo: Archenzo · CC BY-SA 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

DEADLY POISONOUS

Death Cap

Amanita phalloides

Cap 5 to 15 cm · to 15 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Smooth and faintly streaky; olive green, yellowish green or bronze, occasionally almost white. Often sticky when damp.
UNDERSIDE	Gills pure white and they stay white: never pink, never brown.
STEM AND BASE	White, sometimes with a faint pattern, with a drooping ring and a loose cup like sac (the volva) buried at the base.
WHERE	Under oak and beech on heavier soils, late summer onward. Now spread far beyond its native Europe.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Young ones are confused with edible button mushrooms and with green capped Russulas (which have no ring and no volva). Responsible for most fatal poisonings worldwide.

Spotter's tip. Dig, do not pick. Ease the whole base out of the soil with a knife; the sac at the bottom is the single most important thing to see.



Photo: en:User:Ben DeRoy · Public domain · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

DEADLY POISONOUS

Destroying Angel

Amanita virosa

Cap 5 to 12 cm · to 15 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Pure white, often lopsided or conical rather than neatly rounded. Sticky when wet.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white, free, crowded.
STEM AND BASE	White and shaggy, with a fragile ring and a large sac at the base. Smells faintly sweet and unpleasant.
WHERE	Mixed woodland on acid soils, especially under birch; also wooded heath.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Field Mushroom and other white Agaricus (pink or brown gills, no sac). Young puffballs (cut one: a puffball is solid white inside; an Amanita egg shows a mushroom outline).

Spotter's tip. A tall, pure white mushroom in woodland with white gills should be treated as this until proven otherwise.



Photo: Krigore · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

EATEN BY EXPERTS

Amethyst Deceiver

Laccaria amethystina

Cap 1 to 6 cm · to 10 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N D** · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Deep violet when fresh and damp, fading to a dull lilac buff as it dries, which is why it deceives.
UNDERSIDE	Gills thick, widely spaced and the same purple as the cap.
STEM AND BASE	Thin, fibrous, purple, often twisted.
WHERE	Beech and oak woods among leaf litter, usually in scattered groups.
WHEN	August to December.
LOOKALIKES	Lilac Fibrecap (poisonous) has a conical, fibrous, pointed cap and brownish gills. The Deceiver (Laccaria laccata) is the same mushroom in orange brown.

Spotter's tip. Colour is a bad witness. Photograph a fresh one next to a dried out one and you will see why spotters learn shape before colour.



Photo: Jimmie Veitch (jimmiev) · CC BY-SA 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

Wood Blewit

Lepista nuda

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 6 to 15 cm · to 10 cm tall · J F M A M J J A S O N D ·

Spores pale pink

CAP OR BODY	Smooth, lilac to blue violet when young, turning tan from the centre outward. Edge rolled under.
UNDERSIDE	Gills lilac, crowded, and they can be pushed off the cap flesh with a fingernail.
STEM AND BASE	Stout, pale lilac, fibrous, with a slightly bulbous base. No ring.
WHERE	Leaf litter in woods, hedgerows and compost heaps; one of the last mushrooms of the year.
WHEN	September to January.
LOOKALIKES	Purple Cortinarius species (poisonous, with rusty brown gills in age and a cobweb veil when young). Always check that the gills stay lilac, not rust.
CULINARY	Foraged late in the year and always cooked; sold in markets in France and Spain.

Spotter's tip. Smells sweet, almost of orange juice. A Blewit after the first frost is a good sign the season is not over yet.



Photo: Stu's Images · CC BY-SA 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

HANDLE WITH CARE

Honey Fungus

Armillaria mellea

Cap 3 to 15 cm · in clumps to 20 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N D** ·

◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Honey to tawny brown with a darker centre and fine dark scales. Grows in dense clumps.
UNDERSIDE	Gills cream, becoming spotted with brown, running slightly down the stem.
STEM AND BASE	Long, tough and fibrous with a thick whitish ring near the top.
WHERE	The base of trees and stumps, living or dead. A serious parasite that kills trees; black bootlace cords run under the bark.
WHEN	August to December.
LOOKALIKES	Sulphur Tuft (greenish yellow gills, bitter). Funeral Bell (smaller, browner, deadly) grows in the same places.

Spotter's tip. Peel back a flake of bark on the stump: flat black cords like shoelaces are the fungus's feeding network.



Photo: Alan Rockefeller · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

POISONOUS

Sulphur Tuft

Hypholoma fasciculare

Cap 2 to 7 cm · in clumps to 12 cm tall · J F M A M J J A S O N D ·

Spores purple brown

CAP OR BODY	Sulphur yellow with an orange tan centre, smooth, in crowded clusters of dozens.
UNDERSIDE	Gills sulphur yellow at first, turning greenish then purple brown; the green tinge is distinctive.
STEM AND BASE	Yellow, curved, often with a faint dark ring zone left by the spores.
WHERE	Dead stumps, logs and buried wood of all kinds, almost all year round.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Honey Fungus (cream gills, proper ring) and the edible Sheathed Woodtuft, which has a brown two tone cap and brown gills.

Spotter's tip. Touch the tip of your tongue to the cap and spit: intensely bitter. That bitterness is why poisonings are rare.



Photo: Alan Rockefeller · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

DEADLY POISONOUS

Funeral Bell

Galerina marginata

Cap 2 to 6 cm · to 7 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D ·

Spores rusty brown

CAP OR BODY	Small, smooth, tawny to honey brown, paler when dry. Looks like a hundred other little brown mushrooms.
UNDERSIDE	Gills brown, rusty with age.
STEM AND BASE	Brown, hollow, with a thin pale ring that may vanish.
WHERE	Rotting wood: stumps, logs and wood chip, often alongside Honey Fungus.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Sheathed Woodtuft (edible) is nearly identical; experts separate them by spore print and microscope. Contains the same toxins as the Death Cap.

Spotter's tip. This species is the reason spotters keep a simple rule: small brown mushrooms on wood are for photographing, never for the basket.



Photo: Petar Milošević · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

DEADLY POISONOUS

Brown Rollrim

Paxillus involutus

Cap 5 to 15 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A M J **J A S O N** D · Spores brown

CAP OR BODY	Dull olive brown and slightly felted, with an edge that stays tightly rolled under for most of its life. Sunken in the centre.
UNDERSIDE	Gills yellowish, crowded, running down the stem, and bruising dark brown at a touch. They peel away from the cap easily.
STEM AND BASE	Short, stout, the same colour as the cap, bruising brown.
WHERE	Under birch and in mixed woods, parks and heaths; very common.
WHEN	July to November.
LOOKALIKES	Various brown milkcaps (which ooze milk when cut). Once eaten widely in Europe; now known to cause a delayed, sometimes fatal reaction in the blood.

Spotter's tip. Press the gills with a fingertip. The brown bruise that appears in seconds, plus the rolled edge, names it.



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GILLED CAPS OF WOODLAND

Velvet Shank

Flammulina velutipes

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 2 to 8 cm · in clumps to 10 cm tall · J F M A M J J A S O N D ·

◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Glossy orange tan, sticky, in tiers on standing dead wood. One of the few that fruits through frost and snow.
UNDERSIDE	Gills pale cream, fairly widely spaced.
STEM AND BASE	Tough, dark brown and velvety from the base upward; the velvet is the name and the clue.
WHERE	Dead elm, ash, willow and other broadleaves, often high up a trunk.
WHEN	October to March.
LOOKALIKES	Funeral Bell (ring on the stem, brown gills, not velvety).
CULINARY	The wild form of enoki; the slender white supermarket version is this species grown in the dark.

Spotter's tip. The winter find. If the woods look empty in January, scan standing dead trunks at eye level for orange clusters.

GROUP

Boletes, the caps with pores

Sponge like pores under the cap instead of gills. Most are chunky, many bruise blue, and one of them is the most prized wild mushroom in the world.





IN THIS GROUP

Penny Bun (Cep) 29

Bay Bolete 30



Photo: ReddishClover · CC BY-SA 4.0 · Wikimedia Commons

BOLETES, THE CAPS WITH PORES

Penny Bun (Cep)

Boletus edulis

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 8 to 25 cm · to 20 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D ·

Spores olive brown

CAP OR BODY	A baked bread roll: smooth, slightly greasy, brown with a paler rim.
UNDERSIDE	A sponge of tiny pores, white when young, maturing yellow then olive. Does not bruise blue.
STEM AND BASE	Swollen like a barrel, pale, covered near the top with a fine white net pattern.
WHERE	Under oak, beech, birch and pine, especially along woodland rides and edges.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Bitter Bolete (pores turn pink, the net on the stem is dark brown, and the taste is unbearably bitter). Several red pored boletes bruise blue instantly and should be avoided.
CULINARY	Porcini. The most prized wild mushroom in European cooking, used fresh and dried.

Spotter's tip. Slice it in half lengthwise. The flesh should stay white; check the stem for insect tunnels while you are there.



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BOLETES, THE CAPS WITH PORES

Bay Bolete

Imleria badia

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 5 to 15 cm · to 12 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D ·

Spores olive brown

CAP OR BODY	Chestnut to bay brown, velvety when dry, sticky when wet.
UNDERSIDE	Pores cream to yellow, bruising blue green within seconds of being pressed.
STEM AND BASE	Cylindrical rather than swollen, brown streaked, no net.
WHERE	Conifer and mixed woodland, often on mossy banks and rotting stumps.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Penny Bun (no blue bruising, netted stem). Many other boletes bruise blue; the bay cap and streaked stem are the combination to learn.
CULINARY	Foraged and often dried; a good stand in for porcini.

Spotter's tip. Press a thumb into the pores and watch the colour change. The blue is harmless chemistry, not a warning sign in this species.

GROUP

Brackets on wood

Shelves and tiers growing straight out of trunks and logs. No stem, usually tough, often there for months.









IN THIS GROUP

Chicken of the Woods 32

Beefsteak Fungus 33

Turkey Tail 34

Birch Polypore 35

Dryad's Saddle 36



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BRACKETS ON WOOD

Chicken of the Woods

Laetiporus sulphureus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Brackets 10 to 40 cm across, in tiers · J F M A **M J J A S O** N D ·

◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Fan shaped tiers of bright sulphur yellow and orange, soft and moist when young, fading and crumbling when old.
UNDERSIDE	Tiny yellow pores, no gills.
STEM AND BASE	None; attached directly to the trunk.
WHERE	Living or dead oak, sweet chestnut, cherry and yew. Usually visible from a distance.
WHEN	May to October.
LOOKALIKES	Giant Polypore (brown, much larger, at the base of beech). Specimens on yew or eucalyptus can cause reactions.
CULINARY	Foraged young and cooked like chicken; the texture is the point.

Spotter's tip. Note the tree. The same bracket comes back on the same trunk year after year, so a good one is worth a pin on your map.



Photo: Jiří Berkovec · CC BY-SA 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

BRACKETS ON WOOD

Beefsteak Fungus

Fistulina hepatica

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Bracket 10 to 25 cm across · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · Spores pinkish

CAP OR BODY	A red, tongue shaped slab with a moist, slightly rough surface, looking exactly like a piece of raw liver.
UNDERSIDE	Pale pink yellow pores, each a separate tiny tube.
STEM AND BASE	Short, stubby, often off to one side.
WHERE	Low on old oak and sweet chestnut trunks.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Nothing else bleeds red juice when cut. Young ones resemble a red tongue emerging from the bark.
CULINARY	Foraged; sliced thin and eaten raw in salads or seared like a steak.

Spotter's tip. Cut a small wedge from the edge: red marbled flesh that oozes a watery red liquid, the only bracket that does this.



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BRACKETS ON WOOD

NOT FOR THE POT

Turkey Tail

Trametes versicolor

Brackets 3 to 8 cm across, overlapping · J F M A M J J A S O N D ·

◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Thin, leathery, semicircular fans with concentric bands of brown, grey, blue, green and cream; velvety and faintly hairy.
UNDERSIDE	White to cream with very fine pores (3 to 5 per millimetre).
STEM AND BASE	None.
WHERE	Dead hardwood logs, stumps and fence posts, all year, in tiered rosettes.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Hairy Curtain Crust (bright orange underside with no pores). Other Trametes species with fewer colour bands.

Spotter's tip. Flip it over. A true Turkey Tail has pores you can just make out with a hand lens; the crusts it is confused with are smooth below.



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BRACKETS ON WOOD

NOT FOR THE POT

Birch Polypore

Fomitopsis betulina

Bracket 10 to 25 cm across · J F M A M J J A S O N D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A smooth, rounded, kidney shaped hoof in pale grey brown, with a rolled under rim.
UNDERSIDE	White pores, becoming cream with age.
STEM AND BASE	A stubby stalk at the back, sometimes absent.
WHERE	Only on birch, living or dead; it is one of the main reasons birches die.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Nothing on birch looks the same. Known as the Razor Strop fungus because barbers once used strips of it to sharpen blades.

Spotter's tip. The 5,000 year old Iceman found in the Alps carried pieces of this fungus, probably as tinder or first aid.



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BRACKETS ON WOOD

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Dryad's Saddle

Cerioporus squamosus

Bracket 10 to 60 cm across · J F M **A** **M** **J** **J** **A** S O N D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A huge, flat, fan shaped shelf, cream to tan with dark brown feathery scales arranged in rings, like a pheasant's back.
UNDERSIDE	Large, angular cream pores, running down onto the stem.
STEM AND BASE	Short, thick and black at the base, attached at one side.
WHERE	Dead or dying ash, sycamore, beech and elm, often high up. The first big bracket of the year.
WHEN	April to August.
LOOKALIKES	Few at that size and season. Smells distinctly of watermelon rind or cucumber when fresh.
CULINARY	Only the tender young edges are worth cooking; the rest is like cork.

Spotter's tip. A spring find. While most spotters are waiting for autumn, Dryad's Saddles are already the size of dinner plates in May.

GROUP

Puffballs, earthballs and stinkhorns

Round, odd and unmistakable once you know them. Cut one open and the inside tells you what it is.









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Giant Puffball 38

Common Puffball 39

Common Earthball 40

Stinkhorn 41



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PUFFBALLS, EARTHBALLS AND STINKHORNS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Giant Puffball

Calvatia gigantea

Ball 20 to 80 cm across · J F M A M J **J A S O** N D · Spores olive brown

CAP OR BODY	A smooth white sphere the size of a football or bigger, sitting on the ground like a lost ball. Turns yellow then brown and leathery as it ages.
UNDERSIDE	No gills, no pores: a solid mass that becomes olive brown spore dust inside.
STEM AND BASE	None; attached to the ground by a cord of mycelium.
WHERE	Pasture, meadows, nettle beds, hedgerows and woodland edges on rich soil.
WHEN	July to October.
LOOKALIKES	Nothing at full size. Small ones can be confused with the egg stage of an Amanita, so cut it in half to check.
CULINARY	Foraged while pure white inside and sliced into steaks for the pan.

Spotter's tip. Slice it top to bottom. Pure, uniform white like a marshmallow means puffball. Any hint of a cap and stem outline inside means an Amanita egg.



Photo: Daniel Ullrich, Threedots · CC BY-SA 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

PUFFBALLS, EARTHBALLS AND STINKHORNS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Common Puffball

Lycoperdon perlatum

3 to 6 cm across · to 8 cm tall · J F M A M J **J A S O N** D ·

Spores olive brown

CAP OR BODY	A pear shaped white to buff ball covered in tiny cone shaped spines that rub off, leaving a net pattern. A small hole opens at the top when ripe.
UNDERSIDE	White and firm inside when fresh, turning yellow olive and powdery.
STEM AND BASE	A sterile stalk, part of the same body.
WHERE	Woodland floors, path edges and grassland, usually in groups.
WHEN	July to November.
LOOKALIKES	Common Earthball (harder, scaly skin, purple black inside, poisonous). Stump Puffball grows in clusters on wood.
CULINARY	Foraged when the inside is still pure white; mild and slightly nutty.

Spotter's tip. A ripe one puffs a brown cloud when tapped; that is millions of spores. Tap gently and take the photo.



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PUFFBALLS, EARTHBALLS AND STINKHORNS

POISONOUS

Common Earthball

Scleroderma citrinum

3 to 10 cm across · J F M A M J **J A S O N D** · Spores dark brown

CAP OR BODY	A hard, warty, dirty yellow ball with a thick leathery skin, half buried in the ground. Cracks open irregularly rather than through a neat hole.
UNDERSIDE	Inside is purple black and marbled even when young, with a strong rubbery smell.
STEM AND BASE	None.
WHERE	Acid soil on heaths and in woodland, often on bare peaty ground among moss.
WHEN	July to December.
LOOKALIKES	Puffballs (soft, thin skin, pure white inside when young). The dark interior and tough rind separate it instantly.

Spotter's tip. Press it. A puffball gives like a marshmallow; an earthball is as firm as a tennis ball.



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PUFFBALLS, EARTHBALLS AND STINKHORNS

NOT FOR THE POT

Stinkhorn

Phallus impudicus

To 25 cm tall · J F M A M **J J A S O N** D · Spores olive

CAP OR BODY	Begins as a white, jelly filled witch's egg in the ground, then a spongy white column shoots up in hours, carrying a bell shaped head coated in olive green slime.
UNDERSIDE	The slime is the spore mass; flies eat it and carry the spores away, leaving a white honeycomb head.
STEM AND BASE	Hollow, white, spongy and fragile.
WHERE	Woodland, gardens and hedgerows, usually smelt before seen.
WHEN	June to November.
LOOKALIKES	Dog Stinkhorn (slimmer, orange tipped). The egg stage can be mistaken for a puffball; cut it and you will find a gelatinous layer around a compressed stalk.

Spotter's tip. Follow your nose. The smell of rotting meat carries 20 metres or more on a still day, a reliable way to find one.

GROUP

Funnels, spines, cups, jellies and clubs

The shapes that fit nowhere else. Some of the most beautiful finds of the year are in this group.






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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Chanterelle

Cantharellus cibarius

Cap 3 to 10 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A M J **J A S O N** D ·

Spores pale yellow

CAP OR BODY	Egg yolk yellow, funnel shaped with a wavy, irregular edge. Flesh is pale inside.
UNDERSIDE	Not true gills: blunt, forked, vein like ridges that run a long way down the stem and cannot be peeled off.
STEM AND BASE	Solid, tapering downward, the same colour as the cap.
WHERE	Mossy ground under birch, oak, beech and pine, often along path edges.
WHEN	July to November.
LOOKALIKES	False Chanterelle (orange, thin crowded true gills, soft flesh). Jack o'Lantern (grows in clusters on wood, glows faintly in the dark, poisonous).
CULINARY	Girolle. Foraged and sold in markets across Europe and North America; never cultivated successfully.

Spotter's tip. Smell the cap: fresh apricots. Then look underneath; if the ridges look like melted candle wax rather than the pages of a book, it is the real one.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

HANDLE WITH CARE

False Chanterelle

Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca

Cap 2 to 8 cm · to 6 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Orange rather than yellow, soft, slightly felted, with a neatly inrolled edge and a shallow funnel.
UNDERSIDE	Deep orange gills: thin, crowded, forked and soft, running down the stem. They look like real gills because they are.
STEM AND BASE	Slender, orange brown, often curved.
WHERE	Conifer woods, heathland and rotting wood, often in large numbers.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Chanterelle (yellow, blunt ridges, apricot smell, firm flesh). The two often grow within metres of each other.

Spotter's tip. Hold the two side by side if you can. Once seen together, the difference between crowded orange gills and chunky yellow veins is never forgotten.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Hedgehog Fungus

Hydnum repandum

Cap 3 to 12 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N D** · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Pale cream to apricot, irregular and lumpy, velvety, with a wavy margin.
UNDERSIDE	Neither gills nor pores: hundreds of soft, pale spines hang down like tiny stalactites and break off easily.
STEM AND BASE	Stout, white, often off centre.
WHERE	Mossy deciduous and conifer woods, sometimes in rings or arcs.
WHEN	August to December.
LOOKALIKES	Terracotta Hedgehog (smaller and orange). Nothing poisonous has this cap and spines combination.
CULINARY	Pied de mouton. Foraged; firm, peppery and sold alongside chanterelles.

Spotter's tip. Run a finger across the underside. The spines feel like a soft brush and are unlike anything else on this page.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Morel

Morchella esculenta

To 20 cm tall · J F **M** **A** **M** J J A S O N D · ◯ Spores cream

CAP OR BODY	A honeycomb of ridges and deep pits, yellow brown to grey, on a pale stem. The whole thing is hollow from top to bottom.
UNDERSIDE	No gills; spores form inside the pits.
STEM AND BASE	Pale, granular, hollow, joined to the cap at the bottom edge.
WHERE	Disturbed ground, old orchards, gardens, bark mulch and wood chip, and burnt forest the year after a fire. In spring, not autumn.
WHEN	March to May.
LOOKALIKES	False Morel (Gyromitra) is wrinkled like a brain rather than pitted, and not hollow in the same clean way; it has killed people. Raw morels are also toxic.
CULINARY	Foraged in spring and prized in French and American cooking; always cooked, never raw.

Spotter's tip. Cut it lengthwise. A true morel is one continuous hollow chamber, cap and stem together.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Jelly Ear

Auricularia auricula-judae

3 to 10 cm across · J F M A M J J A S O N D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Floppy, translucent, ear shaped lobes of tan to reddish brown jelly, velvety on the outside and smooth and veined within.
UNDERSIDE	No gills; the smooth inner face produces the spores.
STEM AND BASE	Attached at one point directly to the wood.
WHERE	Almost always on elder, dead or alive; also beech and sycamore. Year round, best after rain.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Tripe Fungus (greyer, hairy, on dead birch and beech). Dried out Jelly Ears shrink to hard black crisps and swell again in rain.
CULINARY	Wood ear. The crunchy black fungus of Chinese and Japanese cooking, cultivated on a huge scale.

Spotter's tip. Find an elder. Nine times out of ten, that is where the ears are; it is the easiest fungus to tree pairing to learn.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

NOT FOR THE POT

Scarlet Elf Cup

Sarcoscypha austriaca

Cup 2 to 7 cm across · **J F M A** M J J A S O N **D** · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Shallow, brilliant scarlet cups with a paler, felted outside, sitting on mossy fallen twigs.
UNDERSIDE	The inside of the cup is the spore bearing surface; a ripe cup may puff visibly if you breathe on it.
STEM AND BASE	Tiny or absent.
WHERE	Damp, shady woodland on moss covered fallen branches of willow, hazel and elm.
WHEN	December to April.
LOOKALIKES	Ruby Elf Cup is essentially identical to the eye. Orange Peel Fungus is orange and grows on bare soil in autumn.

Spotter's tip. The midwinter jewel. Look in January and February when nothing else is out; they glow on the forest floor.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

NOT FOR THE POT

King Alfred's Cakes

Daldinia concentrica

2 to 8 cm across · J F M A M J J A S O N D · Spores black

CAP OR BODY	Hard, round, black lumps like burnt buns stuck to dead branches. Reddish brown when young, soot black when mature.
UNDERSIDE	Cut one open: silvery grey and black rings inside, like the growth rings of a tree.
STEM AND BASE	None.
WHERE	Almost always on dead ash; occasionally beech.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Beech Woodwart (much smaller, in groups on beech). Nothing else is this big, black and spherical on ash.

Spotter's tip. Bushcraft classic: a dry one catches a spark and smoulders for an hour. Named after the king who, legend says, burnt the cakes.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

NOT FOR THE POT

Candlesnuff Fungus

Xylaria hypoxylon

To 6 cm tall · J F M A M J J A S O N D · Spores black

CAP OR BODY	Thin black stalks with powdery white tips, often forked into antlers, like a snuffed candle wick.
UNDERSIDE	The white powder is the first spore stage; later the whole thing turns black and rough.
STEM AND BASE	Black, flattened, tough and leathery.
WHERE	Dead stumps and fallen branches everywhere, all year.
WHEN	All year round.
LOOKALIKES	Dead Man's Fingers (fatter, club shaped, like swollen black fingers rising from buried wood). Yellow Stagshorn is bright yellow and jelly like.

Spotter's tip. A good one for children: it is on nearly every rotting stump, so it is the first fungus most spotters learn to name on sight.



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FUNNELS, SPINES, CUPS, JELLIES AND CLUBS

NOT FOR THE POT

Yellow Stagshorn

Calocera viscosa

To 10 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N D** · Spores pale yellow

CAP OR BODY	Bright egg yellow, slimy, branching antlers rising from a single rooted base, firm and rubbery rather than brittle.
UNDERSIDE	No gills; spores form over the whole surface.
STEM AND BASE	Deeply rooted into the wood; it will not pull out cleanly.
WHERE	Conifer stumps and buried conifer roots, often in plantations.
WHEN	August to December.
LOOKALIKES	Coral fungi (Ramaria, brittle, on soil) and Golden Spindles (unbranched, in grassland).

Spotter's tip. Visible from a long way off against dark needle litter. If it is on a pine stump and bends without breaking, you have it.

GROUP

The culinary classics

The mushrooms you meet in a kitchen or a market, from cultivated staples to the great foraged luxuries. Many species in the earlier groups are culinary too; look for the Culinary tag.









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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Lion's Mane

Hericium erinaceus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

10 to 25 cm across · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A shaggy white pompom of soft spines hanging downward, like a frozen waterfall or a lion's mane, with no cap, stem or gills. Yellows with age.
UNDERSIDE	The spines themselves carry the spores; they are 1 to 5 cm long and droop from a single cushion of flesh.
STEM AND BASE	None; attached at one point to the wood.
WHERE	Wounds and hollows on living or dead hardwoods, especially beech and oak, often high up.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Coral Tooth and Tiered Tooth are its branched relatives; all are harmless. Nothing poisonous looks like it.
CULINARY	Cultivated widely; cooked like crab or scallop, and sold as a supplement.

Spotter's tip. In many countries it is rare in the wild and protected. Photograph it, note the tree, and buy the cultivated kind for the kitchen.



Photo: frankenstoen from Portland, Oregon · CC BY 2.0 · Wikimedia Commons

THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Shiitake

Lentinula edodes

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 5 to 12 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F **M A M** J J A **S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Tan to dark brown, often with pale cracks or white flecks near the edge, convex with an inrolled margin when young.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white to cream, crowded, sometimes bruising brown.
STEM AND BASE	Tough, fibrous, pale brown, often off centre; usually discarded in the kitchen.
WHERE	Dead hardwood logs in the forests of Japan, China and Korea. Elsewhere you will meet it on cultivated logs or in the shop.
WHEN	March to May and September to November.
LOOKALIKES	Wild shiitake can be confused with Funeral Bell and other brown wood mushrooms; outside its native range, treat any wild find with suspicion.
CULINARY	Cultivated on logs and sawdust for a thousand years; the second most grown mushroom in the world.

Spotter's tip. Dried shiitake keep for years and have a deeper flavour than fresh; the soaking water is a stock in its own right.



Photo: voir ci-dessous / see below · CC BY 3.0 · Wikimedia Commons

THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Oyster Mushroom

Pleurotus ostreatus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 5 to 20 cm across · J F M A M J J A S O N D · Spores pale lilac

CAP OR BODY	Fan or oyster shell shaped, grey, blue grey or brown, smooth, growing in overlapping tiers.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white to cream, running all the way down the short stem.
STEM AND BASE	Short, stubby and off to one side, or absent altogether.
WHERE	Dead and dying hardwoods, especially beech; appears after cold snaps in autumn and winter.
WHEN	September to March.
LOOKALIKES	Angel Wings (white, thin, on conifers) has caused poisonings in some regions. Several pale lookalikes on wood are tough or bitter rather than dangerous.
CULINARY	Foraged and cultivated worldwide; the easiest mushroom to grow at home.

Spotter's tip. Check that the gills run down the stem and the flesh smells faintly of aniseed. Then look up: oysters often grow well above head height.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

King Oyster

Pleurotus eryngii

Cap 4 to 12 cm · to 15 cm tall · J F M A M J J A **S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A small brown cap on a huge white stem; the proportions are reversed compared with most mushrooms.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white, running down the stem.
STEM AND BASE	Thick, white, firm and meaty, often wider than the cap.
WHERE	Wild on the dead roots of eryngo and other umbellifers in Mediterranean grassland; cultivated almost everywhere else.
WHEN	September to November.
LOOKALIKES	Few; the cultivated form is unmistakable.
CULINARY	Cultivated; the thick stem is sliced into rounds and cooked like scallops.

Spotter's tip. Score the stem slices in a crosshatch before frying and they cook like scallops.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Hen of the Woods (Maitake)

Grifola frondosa

20 to 60 cm across · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A dense rosette of grey brown, spoon shaped fronds growing from a single white base, like a ruffled hen settled at the foot of a tree.
UNDERSIDE	Tiny white pores running down each frond.
STEM AND BASE	A thick branching white core.
WHERE	The base of old oaks, returning to the same tree year after year.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Giant Polypore (larger, blackens when bruised) and Cauliflower Fungus (paler, more crinkled, on conifers).
CULINARY	Foraged and cultivated; maitake in Japanese cooking, roasted whole in restaurants.

Spotter's tip. Once you find one, note the tree. A good oak may produce for decades.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Horn of Plenty

Craterellus cornucopioides

3 to 12 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A thin, funnel shaped black or dark grey trumpet with a flared, wavy edge, hollow right to the base.
UNDERSIDE	Smooth or faintly wrinkled, grey, with no gills at all.
STEM AND BASE	Continuous with the cap; the whole fungus is one hollow horn.
WHERE	Leaf litter under beech and oak, often in large scattered groups that are hard to see against dark soil.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Nothing poisonous. Once you spot one, you will usually find fifty.
CULINARY	Black trumpet. Foraged; dried and ground as a seasoning, or cooked fresh with cream.

Spotter's tip. Look for them on a dull day after rain; in bright sun they vanish into the shadows.



Photo: Dominicus Johannes Bergsma · CC0 · Wikimedia Commons

THE CULINARY CLASSICS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cauliflower Fungus

Sparassis crispa

20 to 50 cm across · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	A pale cream, brain like mass of crinkled lobes, like a ball of egg noodles or a cauliflower.
UNDERSIDE	The lobes carry spores on their surfaces.
STEM AND BASE	A short thick root buried at the base of a conifer.
WHERE	The base of pine and other conifers, often the same tree every year.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Hen of the Woods (on oak, darker, with pores). Nothing dangerous.
CULINARY	Foraged; cooked like pasta or in soups, with a texture like al dente noodles.

Spotter's tip. Wash it well; the folds collect needles, soil and the occasional resident.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Saffron Milkcap

Lactarius deliciosus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 5 to 15 cm · to 7 cm tall · J F M A M J J **A S O N** D ·

Spores pale cream

CAP OR BODY	Orange with darker concentric rings and a dimpled centre, the edge rolled under when young. Bruises green.
UNDERSIDE	Gills orange, crowded, running slightly down the stem; cut them and they leak bright orange milk.
STEM AND BASE	Short, orange, often with darker pits, hollow with age.
WHERE	Under pines, on sandy and acid soils, across Europe and now in pine plantations worldwide.
WHEN	August to November.
LOOKALIKES	Woolly Milkcap (pink, hairy edge, white milk) is poisonous. The orange milk and green bruising are the test.
CULINARY	Foraged; a favourite in Spain, Poland and Russia, grilled or pickled.

Spotter's tip. Scratch the gills and watch for the carrot orange milk; a few minutes later the scratch turns green.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Black Truffle

Tuber melanosporum

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

2 to 8 cm across · J F M A M J J A S O N D · Spores dark brown

CAP OR BODY	A knobbly black lump like a piece of coal, with a rough skin of tiny pyramid warts. Grows underground.
UNDERSIDE	Cut it open: dark flesh marbled with fine white veins and a powerful earthy smell.
STEM AND BASE	None.
WHERE	Buried 5 to 20 cm deep among the roots of oak and hazel on chalky soil, in Mediterranean Europe and in plantations worldwide.
WHEN	November to March.
LOOKALIKES	Summer Truffle (paler flesh, milder) and various false truffles. Without a trained dog you will not find one.
CULINARY	Hunted with dogs and shaved raw over food; the most expensive fungus in the world.

Spotter's tip. Look for the brûlé: a bare ring of ground around a host oak where the truffle has killed the grass.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Matsutake

Tricholoma matsutake

Cap 5 to 20 cm · to 15 cm tall · J F M A M J J A **S** **O** **N** D · ◯ Spores white

CAP OR BODY	Brown, fibrous and scaly, flattening with age; the whole mushroom has a strong spicy, cinnamon smell.
UNDERSIDE	Gills white, crowded, bruising brown.
STEM AND BASE	Thick and firm, with a large cottony ring; often buried deep in the needle litter.
WHERE	Under pine and other conifers in Japan, Korea, Scandinavia and the Pacific Northwest.
WHEN	September to November.
LOOKALIKES	The deadly Amanita smithiana grows in the same North American woods and has fooled experienced pickers; it lacks the spicy smell.
CULINARY	Foraged; the autumn luxury of Japanese cooking, grilled or steamed in rice.

Spotter's tip. Smell is the test. A matsutake announces itself before you see it.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Reishi

Ganoderma lucidum

NOT FOR THE POT

CULINARY

5 to 25 cm across · J F M A M **J J A S O N** D · Spores brown

CAP OR BODY	A glossy, varnished bracket in red brown with a yellow and white growing edge, like a lacquered kidney.
UNDERSIDE	White pores that turn brown when scratched.
STEM AND BASE	Often a long lacquered stalk to one side, which is unusual for a bracket.
WHERE	The base of hardwood stumps and buried roots, especially oak, in warm temperate forests.
WHEN	June to November.
LOOKALIKES	Other Ganoderma species; Artist's Bracket is dull and unvarnished.
CULINARY	Medicinal rather than culinary; too woody to eat, it is simmered into teas and tinctures across East Asia.

Spotter's tip. The varnish is the clue. It looks as if someone has painted it.



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THE CULINARY CLASSICS

Button Mushroom

Agaricus bisporus

EATEN BY EXPERTS

CULINARY

Cap 3 to 15 cm · to 8 cm tall · J F M A **M J J A S O N** D ·

Spores dark brown

CAP OR BODY	White or pale brown, smooth or finely scaly: the familiar shop mushroom. Portobellos are the same species left to open fully.
UNDERSIDE	Gills pink when young, turning dark brown.
STEM AND BASE	Short, white, with a thin ring.
WHERE	Wild on compost, manure heaps and rich soil; cultivated in sheds and caves across the world.
WHEN	May to November.
LOOKALIKES	In the wild it can be confused with Yellow Stainer and with white Amanitas; apply the same checks as for the Field Mushroom.
CULINARY	The most cultivated mushroom in the world; white button, chestnut and portobello are all this species.

Spotter's tip. Flip a shop mushroom over to learn what pink gills turning brown look like; then you will recognise the wild Agaricus family at once.

REFERENCE

The ones that can kill you

The temperate world has only a handful of fungi that are regularly fatal, and nearly all of them share the same toxins as the Death Cap. Learn these first; everything else is detail.

SPECIES	KEY FEATURES	WHERE	PAGE
Death Cap	Olive green cap, white gills, ring, sac at the base	Under oak and beech	19
Destroying Angel	Pure white all over, shaggy stem, sac at the base	Acid woodland, birch	20
Funeral Bell	Small brown cap, brown gills, thin ring, on wood	Stumps, logs, wood chip	25
Brown Rollrim	Rolled under edge, gills bruise brown	Under birch, very common	26
Fool's Funnel	Small white funnel in grass, crowded gills down the stem	Lawns, often in rings	15
False Morel	Brain like wrinkled brown cap, not hollow	Conifer woods in spring	46
Webcaps (Cortinarius)	Rusty brown spores, cobweb veil when young	Woodland, many species	·

What poisoning looks like

The dangerous species are slow. With the Death Cap and its relatives there are typically no symptoms for 6 to 24 hours, then violent sickness, then an apparent recovery while the liver is being destroyed. Anyone who has eaten a wild mushroom and becomes unwell needs medical help the same day, with a sample of what was eaten. Call your local emergency number or poison information centre.

Species that act quickly, such as Fly Agaric, Yellow Stainer and Sulphur Tuft, are unpleasant but rarely fatal in healthy adults. The slow ones are the killers.

REFERENCE

The culinary ones at a glance

Every species in this guide that is eaten somewhere in the world, with a line on how. Cultivated species are the safe way to taste them; the foraged ones belong only in the hands of people who can rule out every lookalike.

SPECIES	HOW IT IS USED	PAGE
Field Mushroom	The wild cousin of the shop mushroom; foraged and fried the same day.	11
Parasol	Foraged; the whole cap is dipped in egg and breadcrumbs and fried like a schnitzel.	13
Shaggy Inkcap	Foraged young and cooked within hours, before it turns to ink.	14
Fairy Ring Champignon	Foraged in small numbers; dries well and revives in soups.	15
Wood Blewit	Foraged late in the year and always cooked; sold in markets in France and Spain.	22
Velvet Shank	The wild form of enoki; the slender white supermarket version is this species grown in the dark.	27
Penny Bun (Cep)	Porcini. The most prized wild mushroom in European cooking, used fresh and dried.	29
Bay Bolete	Foraged and often dried; a good stand in for porcini.	30
Chicken of the Woods	Foraged young and cooked like chicken; the texture is the point.	32
Beefsteak Fungus	Foraged; sliced thin and eaten raw in salads or seared like a steak.	33
Dryad's Saddle	Only the tender young edges are worth cooking; the rest is like cork.	36
Giant Puffball	Foraged while pure white inside and sliced into steaks for the pan.	38
Common Puffball	Foraged when the inside is still pure white; mild and slightly nutty.	39
Chanterelle	Girolle. Foraged and sold in markets across Europe and North America; never cultivated successfully.	43
Hedgehog Fungus	Pied de mouton. Foraged; firm, peppery and sold alongside chanterelles.	45

The culinary ones at a glance, continued

Continued. Remember that a Culinary tag describes the species, not the specimen in your hand.

SPECIES	HOW IT IS USED	PAGE
Morel	Foraged in spring and prized in French and American cooking; always cooked, never raw.	46
Jelly Ear	Wood ear. The crunchy black fungus of Chinese and Japanese cooking, cultivated on a huge scale.	47
Lion's Mane	Cultivated widely; cooked like crab or scallop, and sold as a supplement.	53
Shiitake	Cultivated on logs and sawdust for a thousand years; the second most grown mushroom in the world.	54
Oyster Mushroom	Foraged and cultivated worldwide; the easiest mushroom to grow at home.	55
King Oyster	Cultivated; the thick stem is sliced into rounds and cooked like scallops.	56
Hen of the Woods (Maitake)	Foraged and cultivated; maitake in Japanese cooking, roasted whole in restaurants.	57
Horn of Plenty	Black trumpet. Foraged; dried and ground as a seasoning, or cooked fresh with cream.	58
Cauliflower Fungus	Foraged; cooked like pasta or in soups, with a texture like al dente noodles.	59
Saffron Milkcap	Foraged; a favourite in Spain, Poland and Russia, grilled or pickled.	60
Black Truffle	Hunted with dogs and shaved raw over food; the most expensive fungus in the world.	61
Matsutake	Foraged; the autumn luxury of Japanese cooking, grilled or steamed in rice.	62
Reishi	Medicinal rather than culinary; too woody to eat, it is simmered into teas and tinctures across East Asia.	63
Button Mushroom	The most cultivated mushroom in the world; white button, chestnut and portobello are all this species.	64

REFERENCE

Where to look

Learn eight trees and you have learned where most of this book grows. Mycorrhizal fungi are faithful to their partners, so the tree above you is a clue as good as any feature of the mushroom.

UNDER OR ON	LOOK FOR
Birch	Fly Agaric, Brown Rollrim, Birch Polypore, Destroying Angel, Chanterelle
Oak	Penny Bun, Death Cap, Beefsteak, Chicken of the Woods, Hen of the Woods, Black Truffle, Reishi
Beech	Penny Bun, Death Cap, Amethyst Deceiver, Hedgehog Fungus, Horn of Plenty, Oyster Mushroom, Lion's Mane
Pine and spruce	Bay Bolete, Chanterelle, Saffron Milkcap, Matsutake, Cauliflower Fungus, Yellow Stagshorn
Ash	King Alfred's Cakes, Dryad's Saddle
Elder	Jelly Ear
Dead wood and stumps	Sulphur Tuft, Honey Fungus, Funeral Bell, Turkey Tail, Candlesnuff, Velvet Shank, Shiitake
Open grassland	Field Mushroom, Parasol, Fairy Ring Champignon, Waxcaps, Giant Puffball, Shaggy Inkcap

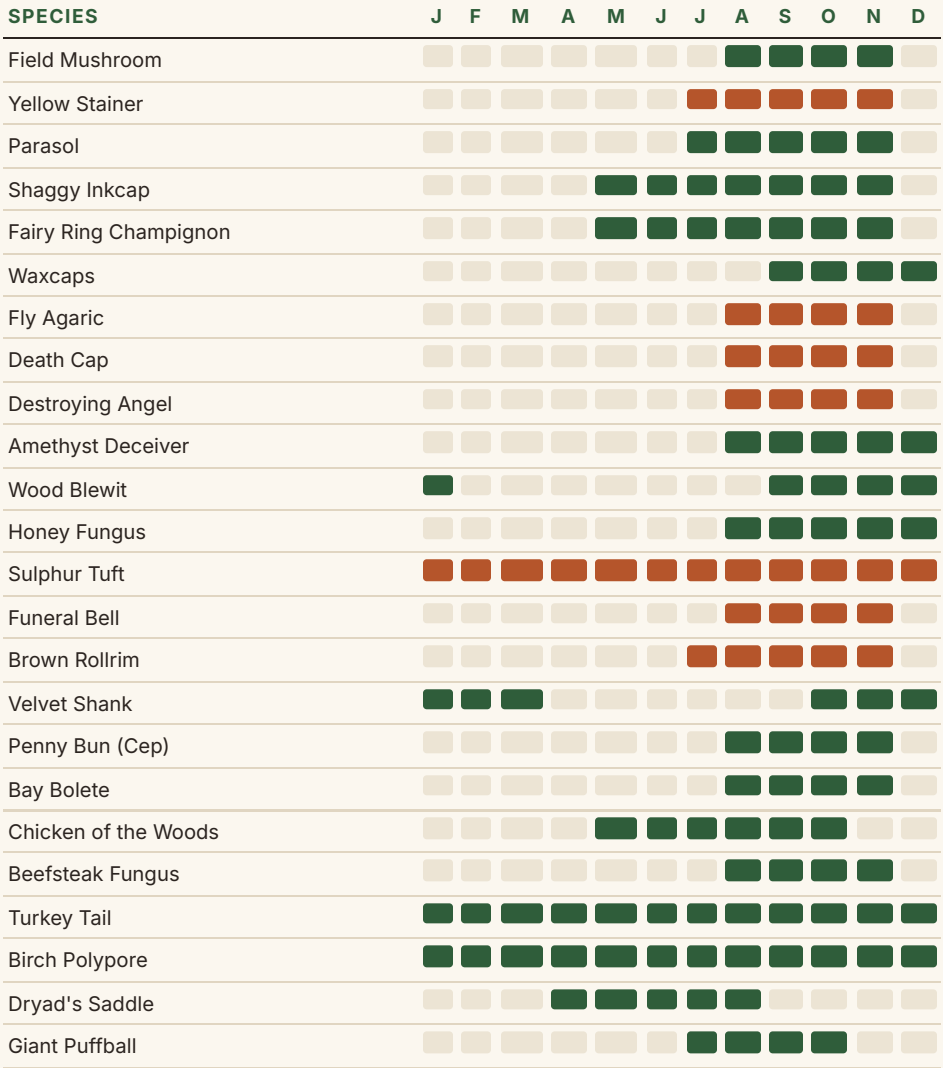
Reading the ground

Acid, sandy soils under birch and pine give a different set of species from heavy clay under oak. Path edges and woodland rides, where the soil is disturbed and light reaches the ground, are reliably richer than deep shade. After rain, give the ground two or three days; most fruit bodies take that long to appear.

REFERENCE

When to look

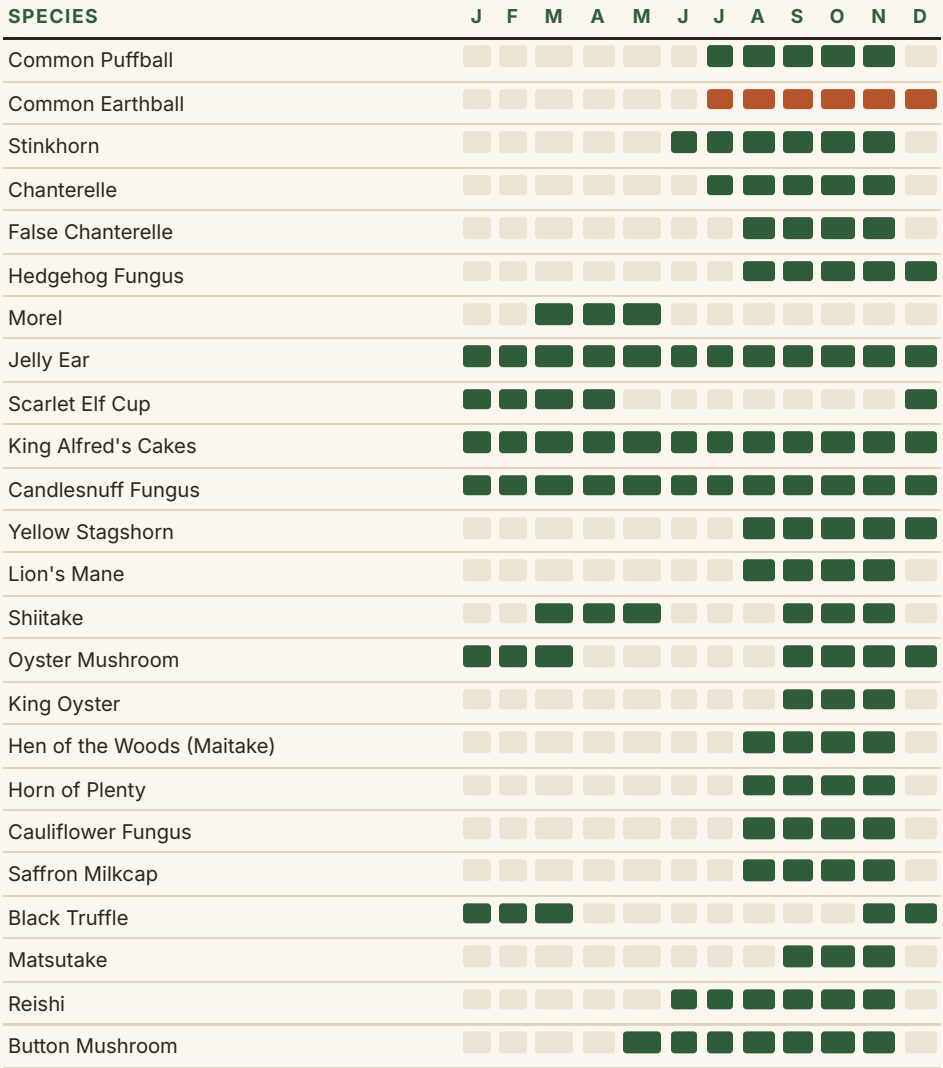
Typical fruiting months in the temperate Northern Hemisphere. Green: usually out. Rust: a poisonous or deadly species is out. Mild wet autumns stretch everything; a hard frost ends most of it.



REFERENCE

When to look

Typical fruiting months in the temperate Northern Hemisphere. Green: usually out. Rust: a poisonous or deadly species is out. Mild wet autumns stretch everything; a hard frost ends most of it.



YOUR NOTES

Spotter's log

One line per find. The last column is for your best guess; write it in pencil and come back to it.

DATE	PLACE AND TREE	CAP	UNDERSIDE	STEM AND BASE	SMELL OR BRUISING	SPORE PRINT	MY NAME FOR IT

Glossary

Bracket: A shelf like fungus growing from wood with no stem.

Bruising: A colour change when the flesh, gills or pores are pressed or cut.

Cap: The top of the mushroom that carries the spore bearing surface beneath it.

Culinary: A species that is eaten and enjoyed somewhere in the world, whether foraged or cultivated. It is a label about cooking, not a promise about the one in your hand.

Decurrent: Gills that run down the stem rather than stopping at it.

Free gills: Gills that stop short of the stem and do not touch it.

Fruit body: The mushroom itself, the part you see. The fungus is the network underground.

Gills: Blade like plates under the cap on which the spores form.

Mycelium: The mass of thread like fungal growth in soil or wood that feeds the fruit body.

Mycorrhizal: Living in partnership with tree roots, which is why many species appear only under certain trees.

Pores: The open ends of tiny tubes under the cap of boletes and brackets.

Ring: The remnant of a veil, left as a skirt or collar on the stem.

Saprotroph: A fungus that feeds on dead material: wood, leaves, dung.

Spore print: The deposit of spores left when a cap is laid gill side down on paper.

Umbo: A raised bump in the centre of the cap.

Veil: A thin tissue covering the young gills (partial veil) or the whole button (universal veil).

Volva: A cup or sac at the base of the stem, left by the universal veil. A warning sign in white or green mushrooms.

Going further

iNaturalist: Upload photographs and get a community identification; also a useful map of what is being found near you. www.inaturalist.org

Mushroom Observer: A long running community of amateur and professional mycologists who will check an identification. mushroomobserver.org

Your local mycological society: Most regions have one. A guided foray with an experienced leader teaches more in a morning than a book does in a year.

A good regional field guide: This guide is general. Pair it with a detailed guide for your own country, where the species list and seasons will be exact.

CREDITS

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THE MUSHROOM SPOTTER

Look closely.
Take notes.
Leave it where it grows.

Forty eight common fungi of the temperate world, grouped by shape, with a photograph, the features to check, the lookalikes to rule out and one field tip for each. Plus the deadly species at a glance, the culinary ones at a glance, the trees to search under, a fruiting calendar, a spotter's log and a glossary.

Share it freely. Print it, keep it on your phone, pass it to a friend who is just starting out.








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