



Fall Mushrooms

By Pamm Cooper, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

This year was an excellent one environmentally for mushrooms. Many species have recently shown up on lawns, in gardens, in the woods and many other places. The mushroom we see is just the reproductive part from which the spores will be dispersed. While many are edible, many mushrooms are not, and some are poisonous. It is not a good idea to eat any mushrooms if you are not able to identify them correctly. There are many look-alikes, so this is a job for an expert.

Mushrooms may have gills, spore capsules or pores underneath the cap which will eventually disperse the spores. Often these are helpful in identification of mushroom families. Boletes, for example, have pores that fill in the underside of the cap and are spongy in texture. The wood hedgehog has teeth rather than gills. Gills are found on the vast majority of mushrooms and may be tightly or loosely spaced. Colors of pores, gills and capsule vary according to species.

Stalks of mushrooms may have veils, streaks, scales, or other useful identification features. The end may have a cup or a ball. Some mushrooms have thick, wide stalks, while others may have thin, wiry stalks like the diminutive pinwheel mushrooms, *Marasimus rotula*.

Puffballs are mushrooms that have a spore capsule instead of gills that will eventually burst and release spores. These mushrooms appear in late summer and early fall, and most start off as white, gray or light brown and may be lumpy, round, smooth or slightly spiny. Most have no stalk. Often these are familiar to people who encounter the familiar *Langermannia giganteum*, which appear as white balls on their lawns. The gem-studded puffball *Lycoperdon perlatum* is white and has small warts and spines on the capsule that give it a gem-like appearance.



Small group gem studded puffballs. Photo by Pamm Cooper

The most recognizable mushroom in the world is the fly agaric. The red cap studded with white warts makes this mushroom easy to recognize. The Eastern yellow fly agaric has a bright yellow cap and white scales that may fall off with age. This agaric is usually found under pines, spruce, hemlocks, birch, oaks, and poplars. Both of these agarics start off as a rounded cap studded with white that will eventually flatten out, reaching 6 or more inches across. Both are from the Amanita family and are poisonous.



Eastern yellow fly agaric likely Amanita muscaria group. Photo by Pamm Cooper

Many people have found it a fun project to make mushroom spore prints. Mushrooms are removed from their stalks and place gill side down on a piece of white paper. Spores will fall in a distinctive pattern as they are released and have a certain color as well. See the link below for information on making spore prints.

<https://www.inhs.illinois.edu/outreach/spotlight/na/make-mushroom-spore-print/>

There are so many mushrooms that every walk can lead to a discovery of a new species and a good book to help identify them is the **Peterson Field Guide to Mushrooms**. Have fun outside and look on the ground, on stumps, on tree trunks and in lawns and gardens for any mushrooms that may appear this fall, and then, perhaps, see if you can identify them. The excitement never ends.

If you have any home & garden questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or www.ladybug.uconn.edu or your local Cooperative Extension Center.