



Track Down Your Toadstool!



Track down your toadstool!

A toadstool is usually thought of as a fleshy fruitbody with a cap and stem. Mushroom is another word meaning the same thing. Many common members of this group of organisms (the fungi) have, however, very different shapes. We have included 35 ‘easy-to-recognise’ fungi in this key and some of them might surprise you by their appearance! There are hundreds of larger fungi in the woodlands and grasslands of the British Isles, so it is quite possible you will find something that is not in this key.

We have classified the fungi together according to their shapes, and this sometimes puts closely related fungi into different keys. For instance, you might like to try and work out why stinkhorns, earth stars and bird’s nest fungi are actually relatives of the puffballs—there is a clue in the Latin word which describes them as the ‘gasteroid’ fungi.

(The answer’s at the back of the book!)

Remember:

Always wash your hands after working with fungi. This key is not designed to help you identify edible fungi.

Never eat a wild mushroom unless you are absolutely certain that you have identified it correctly or have asked an expert first.



When you see this symbol, it means that your fungus is probably not in the key—try looking in a book on fungi! We have suggested some useful books to look in at the end of the key.

Track down your toadstool!

Read the first question. If your answer is 'YES', see which key you need to look at next.
If the answer is 'NO' then go to the next question.

1. Does your fungus have a cap and stem?
The cap can have gills, pores or spines underneath it. YES LOOK AT **KEY A**
NO GO TO QUESTION 2 

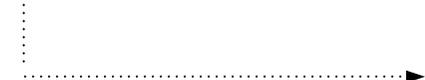
2. Does your fungus look like a shelf or fan?
It will probably be growing on a tree trunk or stump if the answer is yes. YES LOOK AT **KEY B**
NO GO TO QUESTION 3 

3. Is your fungus 'club' shaped with a stem but no cap?
Sometimes the top can be split into 'branches' YES LOOK AT **KEY C**
NO GO TO QUESTION 4 

4. Is your fungus round, like a ball and usually growing in grassy places?
It can sometimes have a short, thick stem part. YES LOOK AT **KEY D**
NO GO TO QUESTION 5 

5. Is your fungus a blob on a leaf or piece of wood? YES LOOK AT **KEY E**
NO GO TO QUESTION 6 

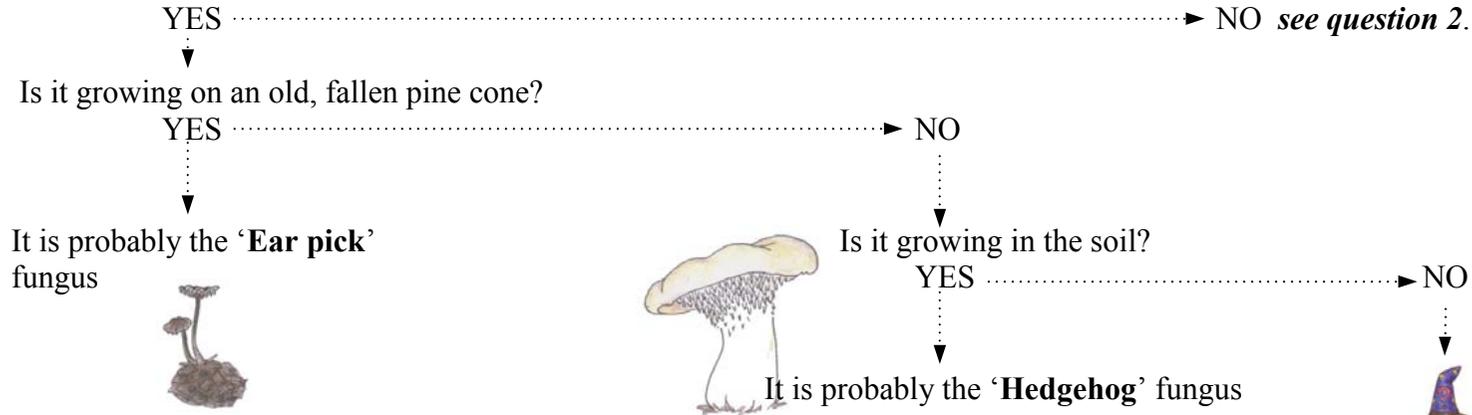
6. Is your fungus like a cup or bowl, sitting on the ground with no stem?
OR is there a small ball-shaped centre raised up on several legs? YES LOOK AT **KEY F**
NO 



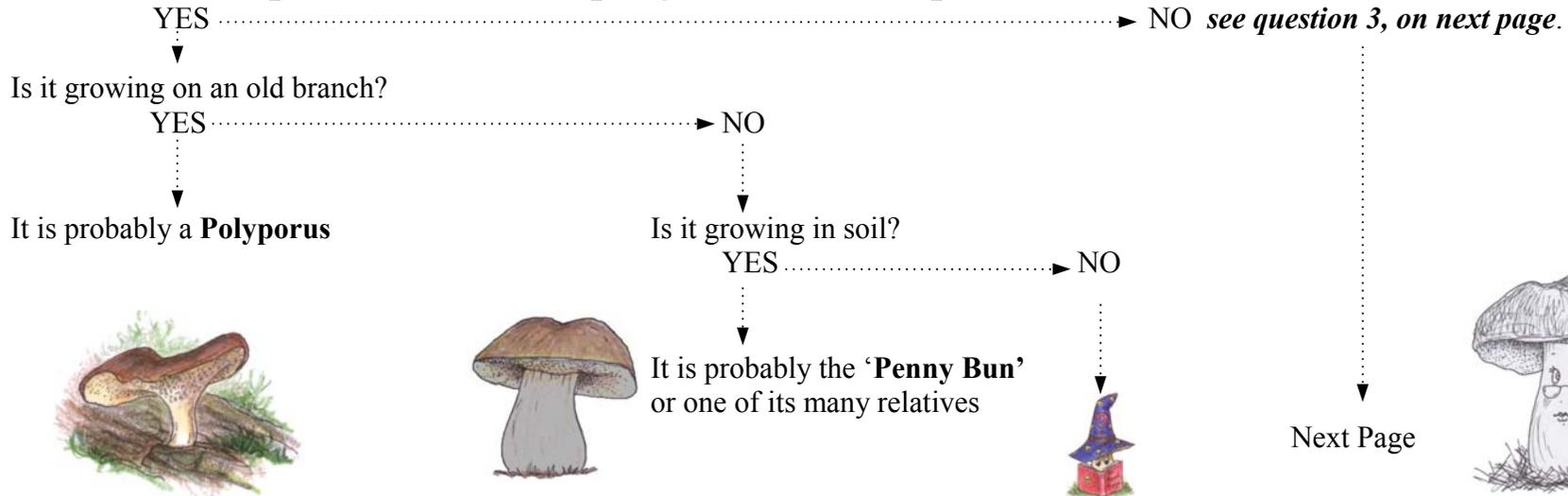
KEY A Fungi with a cap and a stem

Start at question 1 and answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.

1. Does it have lots of little 'tooth-like' spines under the cap?



2. Does it have pores (a bit like a sponge) under the cap?

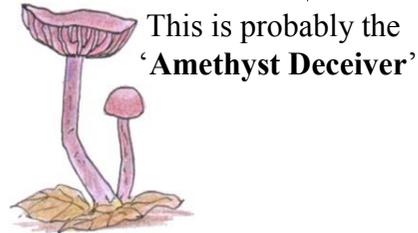


Key A continued from previous page

Does it produce a milky substance when broken?

YES NO

This is probably one of the 'Milk Cap' species



Is it purple all over?
YES NO



Is it bright red all over?
YES NO

This is probably the 'Scarlet Hood'

Does it have a shaggy white cap that rots to a black, inky mess?

YES NO

This is probably 'Shaggy Ink Cap' or 'Lawyers Wig'

Is it yellow all over with a cap shaped like the end of a trumpet and gills that run down the stem?

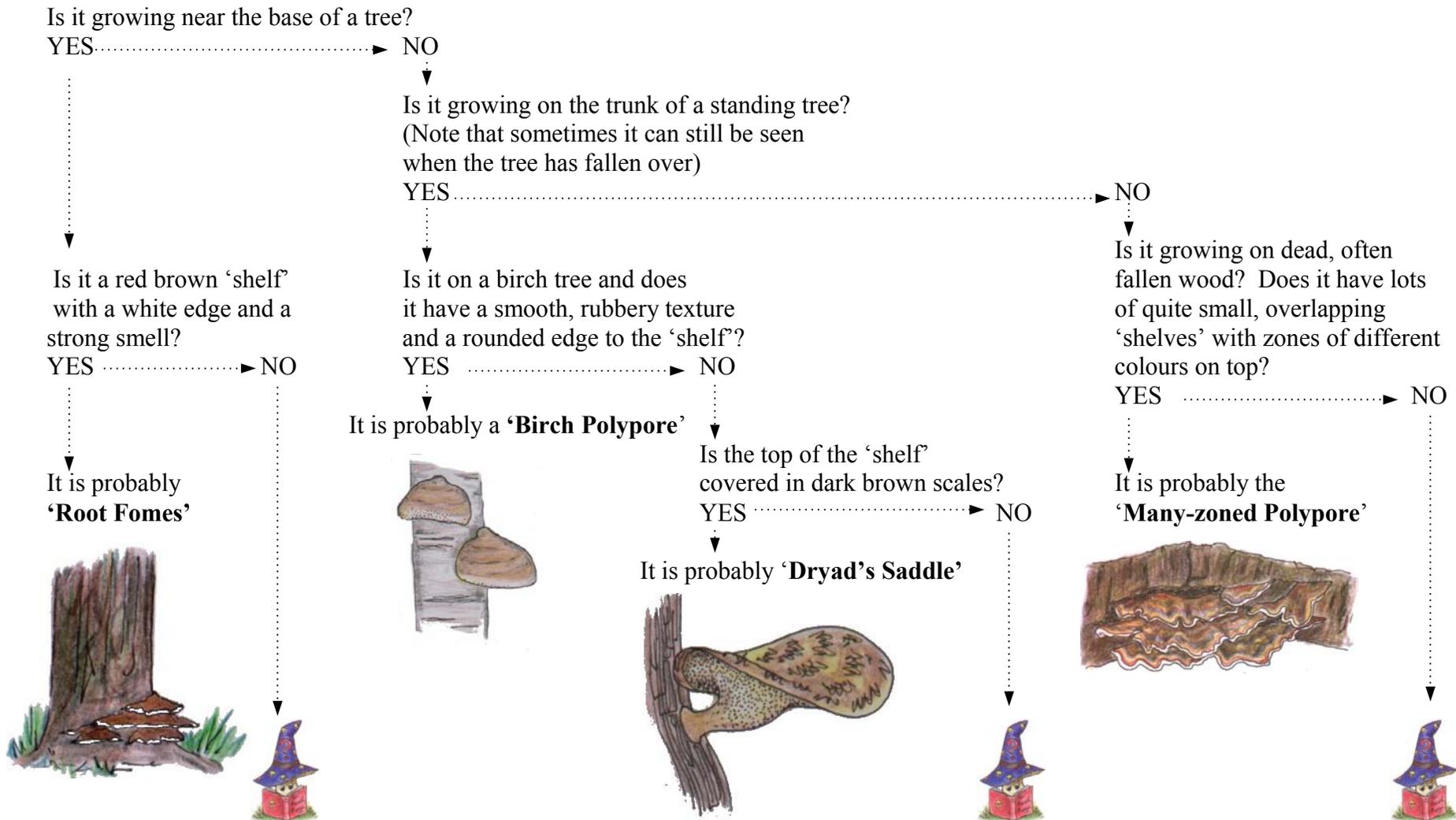
YES NO

This is probably 'Chanterelle'



KEY B Fungi that Look Like a Shelf or a Fan

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.



KEY C Fungi that are 'club' shaped with a stem and head area but no cap. Sometimes the top is branched.

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.

Is the top of the fungus covered in a very smelly 'goo' which attracts flies?

YES NO

It is probably a 'Stinkhorn'



Is it black?

YES NO

Is it growing on wood?

YES NO

Do the clubs look like black fingers?

YES NO

It is probably 'Dead Man's Fingers'



Do the clubs have branched, grey ends?

YES

It is probably 'Candle-Snuff' fungus



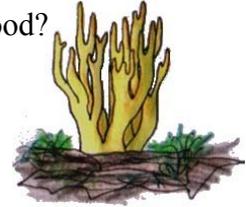
Are the clubs growing in grassland?

YES
They are probably 'Earth Tongues'



Is it yellow, branched and growing on wood?

YES
It is probably 'Stag's Horn' fungus



Don't worry if your fungus is not here! Try looking for it in a book on fungi.



KEY D Fungi that are round like a ball

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.

Is it white when young and fresh?

YES NO

Is the 'ball' more than 10cm across

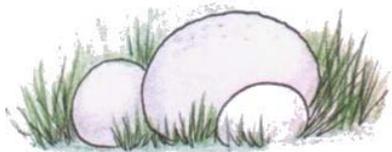
YES NO

It is probably a
'Giant Puffball'

Is it less than 6cm across?

YES

It is probably a **'Bovista Puffball'**



Is it a pale creamy brown when young and fresh?

YES

Is it growing on wood?

YES

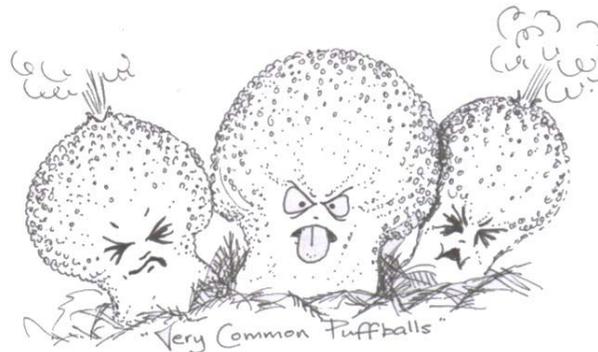
It is probably a **'Wood Puffball'**

NO

Is it growing in soil with
a short, fat stem and little
warts on the top?

YES

It is probably the
'Common Puffball'



Still not found it? Don't worry!



KEY E Fungi that look like a blob on dead wood or leaves

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.

Is it black?

YES

NO

Is it on wood?

YES

NO

Is it like black jelly?

YES

It is probably

'Witches' Butter'



Is it on a fallen sycamore leaf?

YES

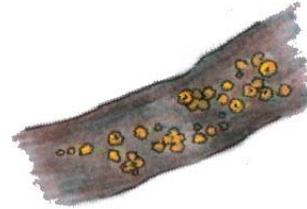
It is probably **'Tar Spot'** fungus



Is the blob small, orange, squishy and on wood?

YES

It is probably **Dacrymyces**



NO

Is the blob small, pinkish, hard and on wood?

YES

It is probably **'Coral Spot'** fungus

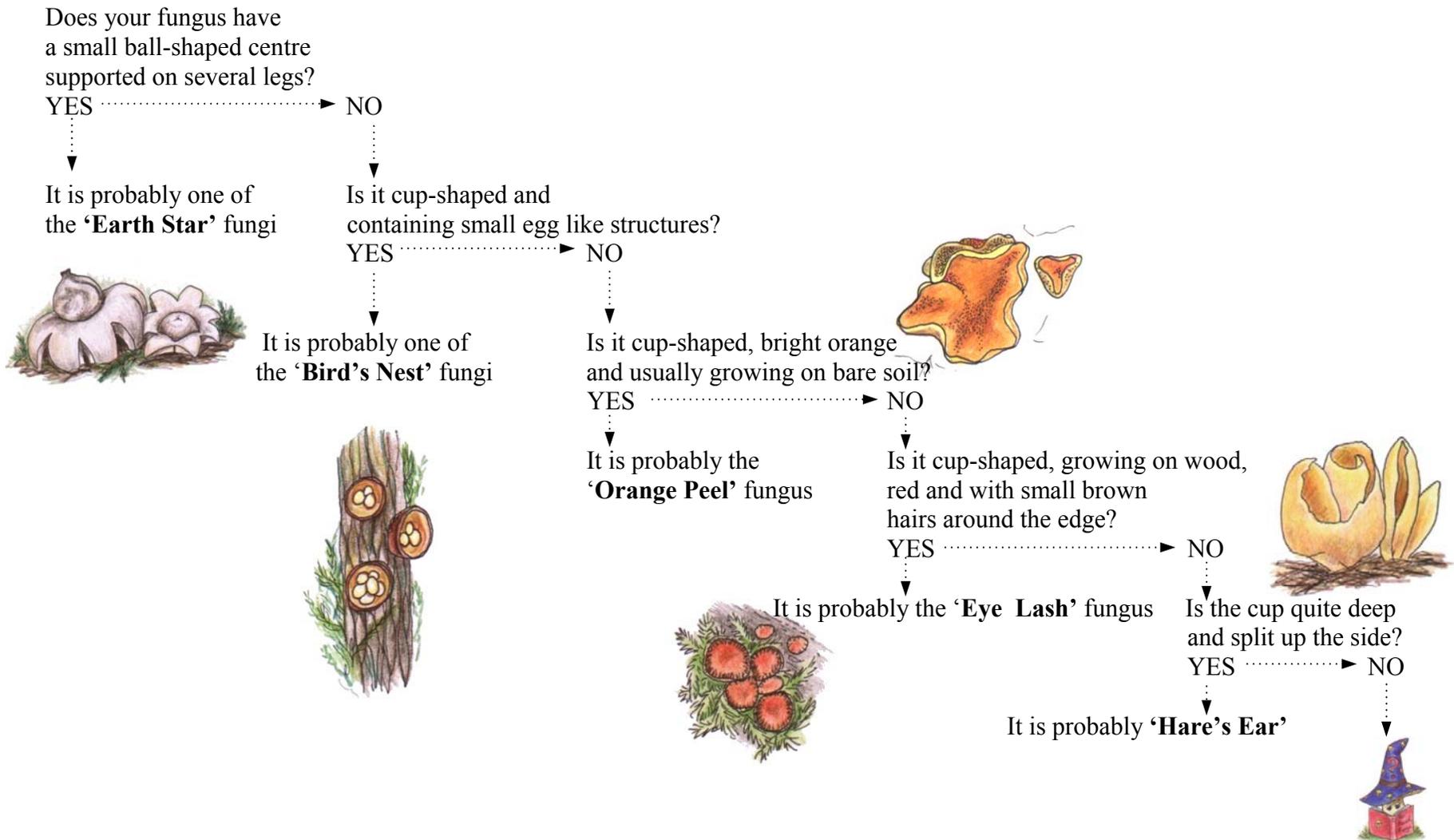


Still not found it? Don't worry!



**KEY F Fungi that are like a cup or a bowl, sitting on the ground without a stem
OR have a small ball-shaped centre supported on several legs.**

Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions below; follow the arrows and see if your fungus is here.





The Naming of Fungi

Whilst the common English names are often historically interesting, descriptive and easy to get your tongue around, only a very few fungi have been given such a name. A further problem with common names is that sometimes people will use different names for the same fungus, or the same name for different fungi!

Fortunately, every fungus does have a Latin scientific name and if you look up their meanings these can be descriptive too. The first part of the name tells you what group (genus) the fungus belongs to and the second part of the name is specific to that fungus (species).

We have listed below all of the fungi included in this key. When only one Latin name is given below you will know that you have only keyed-out the fungus as far as its genus. Mycologists (this is what you call the people who study fungi) are finding out new information about fungi all the time, and sometimes a fungus will be given a different Latin name as a result of new research.

Amethyst Deceiver.....	<i>Laccaria amethystea</i>	Giant Puffball.....	<i>Langermannia gigantea</i>
Birch Polypore.....	<i>Piptoporus betulinus</i>	Hare's Ear fungus.....	<i>Otidea onotica</i>
Bird's nest fungi.....	<i>Cyathus</i> or <i>Crucibulum</i> or <i>Nidularia</i> species	Hedgehog fungus.....	<i>Hydnum repandum</i>
Blusher.....	<i>Amanita rubescens</i>	Many-zoned Polypore..	<i>Trametes versicolor</i>
Bovista Puffball.....	<i>Bovista</i> species	Milk Caps.....	<i>Lactarius</i> species
Candle-snuff fungus...	<i>Xylaria hypoxylon</i>	Orange Peel fungus.....	<i>Aleuria aurantia</i>
Chanterelle.....	<i>Cantharellus cibarius</i>	Penny Bun.....	<i>Boletus edulis</i>
Common Puffball.....	<i>Lycoperdon perlatum</i>	Plums and Custard.....	<i>Tricholomopsis rutilans</i>
Coral Spot fungus.....	<i>Nectria cinnabarina</i>	Polyporus	<i>Polyporus</i> species
Dacrymyces.....	<i>Dacrymyces</i> species	Porcelain fungus.....	<i>Oudemansiella mucida</i>
Dead Man's Fingers....	<i>Xylaria polymorpha</i>	Root Fomes.....	<i>Heterobasidion annosum</i>
Dryad's Saddle.....	<i>Polyporus squamosus</i>	Scarlet Hood.....	<i>Hygrocybe coccinea</i>
Ear pick fungus.....	<i>Auriscalpium vulgare</i>	Shaggy Ink Cap.....	<i>Coprinus comatus</i>
Earth Star fungus.....	<i>Geastrum</i> species	Stag's Horn fungus.....	<i>Calocera viscosa</i>
Earth Tongues.....	<i>Geoglossum</i> or <i>Trichoglossum</i> or <i>Microglossum</i> species	Stinkhorn.....	<i>Phallus impudicus</i>
Eye Lash fungus.....	<i>Scutellinia scutellata</i>	Sulphur Tuft.....	<i>Hypholoma fasciculare</i>
Fly Agaric.....	<i>Amanita muscaria</i>	Tar Spot fungus.....	<i>Rhytisma acerinum</i>
		Witches' Butter.....	<i>Exidia glandulosa</i>
		Wood Puffball.....	<i>Lycoperdon pyriforme</i>

More Reading

If you have enjoyed this key and would like to try something a little bit more challenging, try:

‘An initial guide to the identification of Mushrooms and Toadstools’

available from Paul Nichol, Strawberry Howe,
14 Horncastle Road, Woodhall Spa, Lincs LN10 6UZ

Other useful books:

‘Mushrooms and other fungi of Great Britain and Europe’

by Roger Phillips, published by Pan Books 1981

‘Collins How to Identify Edible Mushrooms’

by Patrick Harding, Tony Lyon and Gill Tomblin,
HarperCollins Publishers 1996

‘How the fungus got its spots—an explainer’s guide to fungi’

available from the the BMS Librarian,
c/o British Mycological Society,
Joseph Banks Building,
Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Richmond Surrey, TW9 3AB



‘Fungus Fred goes Foraying’

by Maggie Hadley

Most of the information that you need to use this key can be found using a ‘dental’ mirror to look underneath the fungus’ cap!

These can be obtained from :

Scientific and Chemical Supplies,
Carlton House, Livingston Rd, Bilston,
West Midlands, WV14 0QZ. Tel: 01902 402402

There is lots of information about fungi on the internet. Here are some addresses to get you started:

<http://www.britmycolsoc.org.uk/> Website of the British Mycological Society

<http://www.nifg.org.uk/home.htm> Website of the Northern Ireland Fungus Group—lots of good links and ‘fascinating facts’.

<http://www.rbge.org.uk/research/celtica/fc.htm> The Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh 'Flora Celtica' site has information on fungal uses in the section on Scottish Plant Uses

And finally.....

Remember we asked you why were stinkhorns, earth stars and bird’s nest fungi related to puffballs? The answer’s in the Latin words describing them - ‘gasteroid’ which has the same root as ‘gastric’ and refers to a stomach; the spores of all these fungi develop inside a closed, or ‘stomach-like’ fruitbody - at least in the early stages!



Text by Liz Holden, illustrations by Kath Hamper

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Additional copies of this key may be obtained from:

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British Mycological
Society promoting fungal science

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