



Edible Wild Mushrooms

~A basic introduction~



Fungi – The Organism

- Fungi are one of the 3 main kingdoms of life (Animal, Plant and Fungal) They are the decomposers in nature – without Fungi, life would not exist.
- Fungi is largely a mostly hidden structure called the Mycelium, which is made up of thousands of strands of Hyphae and colonises dead and dying organic matter.
- Mushrooms are only the fruiting body of the Fungi, much like apples are the fruiting body of the Apple Tree.
- The Hyphae often look like many fine strands of cotton wool, usually white, but other colours too.

Strands of Hyphae making up the Mycelium



Fungi – The Largest Organism?

- The largest known colony of fungi is Honey Fungus (*Amillaria ostoyae*) known in East Oregon, USA, and is currently over 3.7 sq/miles, which is over 2384 acres. The Mushrooms are edible but not great
- It is at least 2400 years old and is probably a lot older, putting it among the oldest *and* largest living organisms know to us.



Numbers and Edibility



- There are apx. 75,000 recorded species of Fungi in the world, and many thousands more not known . Over 4000 (and counting) of these are recorded growing in the UK and experts guess that there are closer to 15,000.
- In the UK, there are around 1000 edible species, 400 worth picking to eat, and 30+ species that are considered very good eating.
- In this talk, we will cover only a very small selection. When and where to find them, lookalikes, dangerous fungi and a word on edibility.

The Mushrooms



Edible:

Cep/Porcini/Penny Bun – *Boletus edulis* --- **Orange Birch Bolete** – *Leccinum versipelle*

Hedgehog Mushroom – *Hydnum repandum* & **Terracotta Hedgehog** – *Hydnum rufescens*

Chanterelle – *Cantharellus cibarius* --- **Chicken of the Woods** – *Laetiporus sulphureus*

Hen of the Woods – *Grifola frondosa* --- **Oyster Mushroom** – *Pleurotus ostreatus*

Poisonous:

The Death Cap - *Amanita phalloides*

The Destroying Angel - *Amanita virosa*

The Fly Agaric - *Amanita muscaria*





Cep/Porcini/Penny Bun

Boletus edulis

- **Habitat:** Woodland - Oak, Beech, Birch & Conifers.
- **Prefers:** Open spaces, with little other plant growth (competition)
- **Season:** Summer to late Autumn
- **Lookalikes:** Lots of variation within Ceps, *B. edulis* always has a white 'net' around the stem. The Bitter Bolete (*Tylopilus felleus*), The Bay Bolete (*Boletus badius*) Edible and good!
- **Edibility:** Prized and classic.



Cep - *Boletus edulis*



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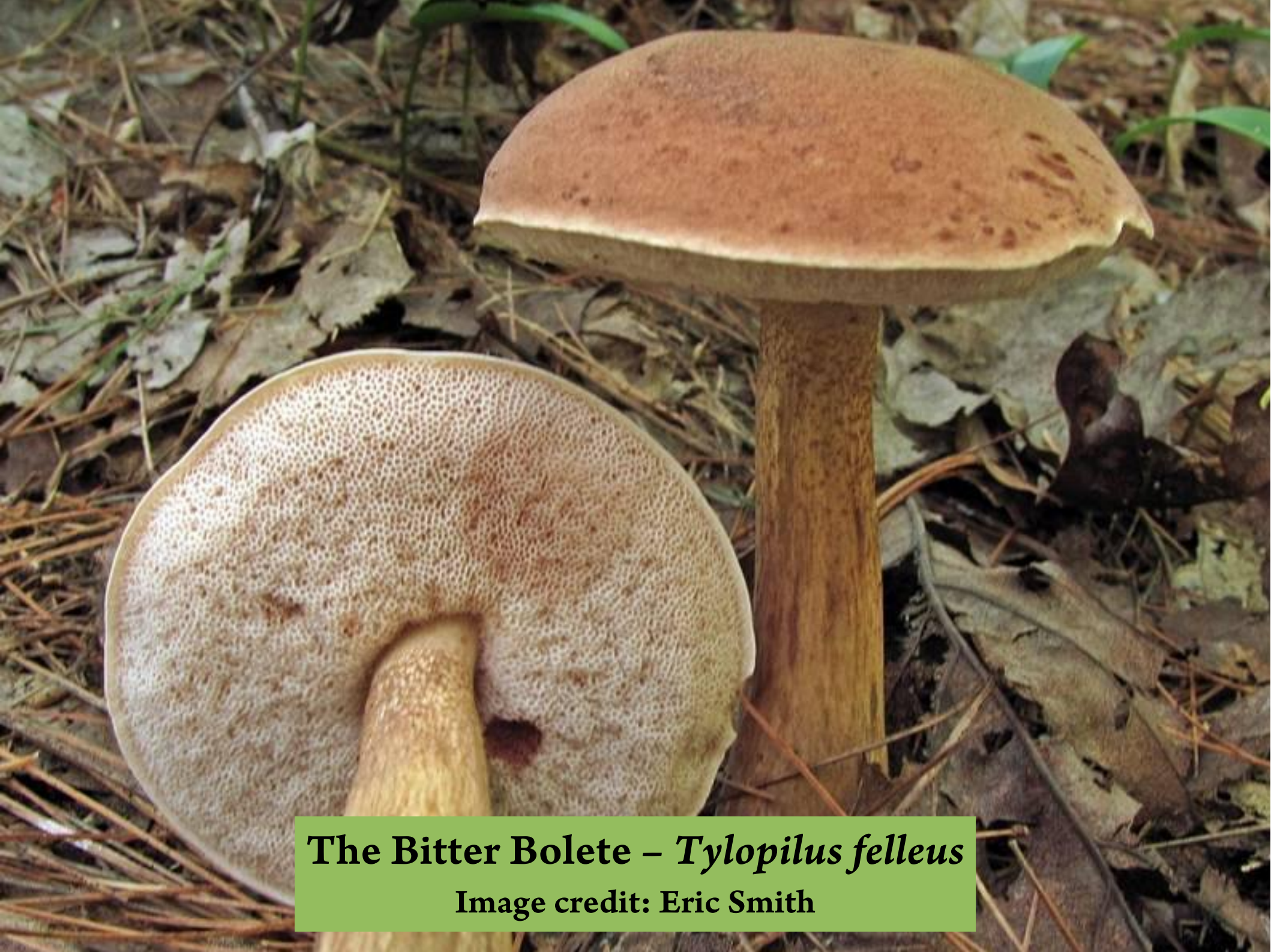
Cep - *Boletus edulis*



Cep - *Boletus edulis*



Cep - *Boletus edulis*



The Bitter Bolete – *Tylopilus felleus*

Image credit: Eric Smith



Boletus aureus



Boletus badius - Bay Bolete



Orange Birch Bolete - *Leccinum versipelle* & Brown Birch Bolete - *L. scabrum*

- **Habitat:** Woodland, in association with Birch Trees
- **Prefers:** Scrubland and open Woodland under Birch Trees
- **Season:** Summer - Autumn
- **Lookalikes:** The Orange Oak Bolete (*Leccinum quercinum*)
Edible but not as good as the Orange Birch Bolete
- **Edibility:** Good texture, turns black when cooking



Orange Birch Bolete – *Leccinum versipelle*



Orange Birch Bolete – *Leccinum versipelle*



Orange Birch Bolete – *Leccinum versipelle*



Orange Birch Bolete – *Leccinum versipelle*



Brown Birch Bolete – *Leccinum scabrum*



Brown Birch Bolete – *Leccinum scabrum*



Hedgehog Mushroom - *Hydnum repandum* & Terracotta Hedgehog - *Hydnum rufescens*

- **Habitat:** Broadleaved or Coniferous woodland.
- **Prefers:** Not picky but usually fruits in larger numbers in Broadleaved Woodland.
- **Season:** Summer – Autumn.
- **Lookalikes:** None apart from very rare 'toothed' fungi of the same genus
- **Edibility:** Firm texture and lots of flavour.



Hedgehog Mushroom – *Hydnum repandum*



Hedgehog Mushroom – *Hydnum repandum*



Hedgehog Mushroom – *Hydnum repandum*



Hedgehog Mushroom – *Hydnum repandum*



Terracotta Hedgehog – *Hydnum rufescens*



Terracotta Hedgehog – *Hydnum rufescens*



Terracotta Hedgehog – *Hydnum rufescens*



Chanterelle

Cantharellus cibarius

- **Habitat:** Woodland. Oak, Beech & Pine. (Pine especially in the north)
- **Prefers:** Moist and/or Mossy areas and loose leaf-litter.
- **Season:** Summer to Autumn.
- **Lookalikes:** Jack O'Lantern (*Omphalotus illudens*) Poisonous but rare in the UK. False Chanterelle (*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*) Common, edible but flaccid.
- **Edibility:** Excellent and said to taste of apricots.



Chanterelle – *Cantharellus cibarius*



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Chanterelle – *Cantharellus cibarius*



Chanterelle – *Cantharellus cibarius*



False Chanterelle – *Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*

Image Credit: Eric Smith



Chicken of the Woods

Laetiporus sulphureus

- **Habitat:** On dead and dying trees. Oak, Sweet Chestnut, Willow, Cherry, Fruit trees and more.
- **Prefers:** Damaged or dying mature Oak trees.
- **Season:** Late spring – Autumn
- **Lookalikes:** Possibly mistakeable for The Giant Polypore (*Meripilus giganteus*) pictures in next section.
- **Edibility:** Shelf-tips a speciality, texture of chicken, must be cooked for 15 minutes or more.



Chicken of the Woods – *Laetiporus sulphureus*



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Chicken of the Woods – *Laetiporus sulphureus*



Hen of the Woods

Grifola frondosa

- **Habitat:** At the base of Broadleaves such as Oak and Beech
- **Prefers:** Oak
- **Season:** Autumn
- **Lookalikes:** Giant Polypore (*Meripilus giganteus*) which is edible but almost tasteless.
- **Edibility:** firm and flavourful, best when young.



Hen of the Woods – *Grifola frondosa*



Hen of the Woods – *Grifola frondosa*



Hen of the Woods – *Grifola frondosa*



Giant Polypore – *Meripilus Giganteus*



Giant Polypore – *Meripilus Giganteus*



Oyster Mushroom

Pleurotus ostreatus

- **Habitat:** On rotting/fallen tree stumps of deciduous trees.
- **Prefers:** Usually fallen Beech Trees.
- **Season:** Spring to Late-Autumn.
- **Lookalikes:** Almost unmistakable, maybe *Creditopus* sp. (inedible)
- **Edibility:** Very good flavour, if a little rubbery and often plentiful. Great Pan-fried or with Pasta.



Oyster Mushroom – *Pleurotus ostreatus*



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Oyster Mushroom – *Pleurotus ostreatus*



Creditopus sp.



Creditopus sp.



The Death Cap

Amanita phalloides

- **Habitat:** Both Deciduous & Coniferous Woodland
- **Prefers:** Oak & Beech
- **Season:** Autumn
- **Appearance:** Dull green cap, white stem with ring.
- **Toxicity:** Fatal - One is enough to kill a person.
- **Frequency:** Less common than most edibles but often seen.



The Death Cap - *Amanita phalloides* (Image credit: D. Borgarino)



The Destroying Angel

Amanita virosa

- **Habitat:** Both Deciduous & Coniferous Woodland
- **Prefers:** Birch.
- **Season:** Autumn.
- **Appearance:** Totally white, ring around the stem
- **Toxicity:** Fatal - One is enough to kill a person.
- **Frequency:** Common but less so than The Death Cap.



The Destroying Angel - *Amanita virosa* (Image credit: Leif Stridvall)



The Fly Agaric

Amanita muscaria

- **Habitat:** In association with Pine & Birch
- **Prefers:** Birch.
- **Season:** Autumn.
- **Appearance:** Tell tale red cap with white spots.
- **Toxicity:** Very Poisonous, one cap won't kill but 10+ will.
- **Frequency:** Common, sometimes in large troops.



The Fly Agaric - *Amanita muscaria*



The Fly Agaric - *Amanita muscaria*



Mushroom Picking Etiquette

- When picking, leave at least a few to continue to spread spores for next years crop.
- With very large troops, try to leave 1 / 3 to 1/2 of all you find for other pickers and to help the fungi spread and increase in number for next year. Pick only what you need.
- Try to harvest each Mushroom by cutting them off at the base instead of tearing them out of the ground/wood which will probably damage the mycelium and affect future numbers. When picking unknowns for ID, twist the mushroom out and try to fill the hole left with the surrounding organic matter.
- Carrying picked specimens in a container with holes in such as a basket will help the Mushrooms breathe on the way home – this also helps distribute the spores as you walk through the woods.

Recommended Reading

- **'River Cottage Handbook No. 1: Mushrooms'** by John Wright – *A wonderful and witty introduction to the world of Edible Mushrooms. ID for Edibles and poisonous Fungi and a good selection of tasty recipes*
- **'The Complete Book of Mushrooms'** by Peter Jordan
- **'The Foolproof Mushroom Pickers Guide'** by Peter Jordan – *A great guide to Edible Mushroom Foraging.*
- **'Mushrooms'** by Roger Phillips – *A comprehensive volume for over 1200 mushrooms & fungi found in the UK & beyond.*
- **'A Passion for Mushrooms'** by Antonio Carluccio – *Another indispensable book by a passionate restaurateur with great ID sections and wonderful recipes.*
- **'Collins Complete British Mushrooms & Toadstools'** by Sterry & Hughes – *A very good photographic field guide.*

Contact details

Available for more detailed talks, half and full day forays with mushroom lunch and further in-depth identification, more edible, general and rare fungi.

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