

AUTUMN

Toadstools on dung.



Birch polypore.



FUNGI

Autumn is the prime time of year for fungi. The grassy areas of our uplands contain many fungi known to experts as LBJs (little brown jobs); identifying them involves all sorts of specialised techniques. Here are just a few of the fungi you are most likely to see on the hill or when leaving the wooded areas. Of particular note are the splendid toadstools and mushrooms which grow in the cow dung around the base of Tryfan, in Cwm Idwal and in Cwm y Llan.

Sheep dung yields a few small specimens and there are also some to be found in bogs and on the grassland. Wherever there are trees, there will be some fungi to inspect. Fungi always grows on organic matter be it dung, wood or other rotting vegetation.

There are many thousands of fungi in the British Isles and most fungi identification books only contain the most common hundred or so from a range of habitats. Identification can be very difficult so if determined to eat the fungi found, referring to a fungi expert is strongly recommended! To identify fungi, it is best to take them home in a dry container and take note of all the different aspects of the fungi such as cap shape, gill, stem, habitat and colour. Common names can be regional and mycologists insist we use the Latin names to avoid confusion. Most fungi vary their shape and colour as they mature, making identification even more difficult.

Birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*)

This common bracket fungus is found, as the name suggests, on birch trees. Usually on the trunk of dead or dying trees, it attacks the heartwood and sapwood. The very firm flesh has been used for sharpening razors and this gives rise to the alternative name of razor-strop fungus. The brackets can be between 10cm and 20cm across and 3–8cm thick. It begins life in a rounded form maturing into a hoof shape. The underside and rim is white and the convex top turns pale brown. It can be found all year round and although technically edible, it has an acquired taste!



Boletes

Boletes are characterized by their lack of gills. Instead, they have tubes which open through pores, giving a sponge-like appearance under the cap. Some of the boletes can grow to 30cm across, so will stand out boldly as you pass through the broad-leaved woodlands on your way to the open land above. Most, but not all, of the boletes provide good eating.

Butter waxcap (*Hygrocybe ceracea*)

This small yellow agaric is found in sheep-cropped grass, usually in small groups. It has a greasy cap and a dry stem, sometimes with an orange tinge. The cap becomes flatter and depressed as it matures. The cap will be between 1cm and 4cm across and the stem may be 2–4cm tall. The butter waxcap is edible.



Butter waxcap (and right).



Common jelly spot.



Fly agaric in the woods at Fachwen, a popular spot for novice rock climbers.

Common jelly spot (*Dacrymyces stillatus*)

The common jelly spot is a frequently occurring fungus. It is found on rotting wood of all kinds in damp places. The small, never more than 5mm, cushion-like fruiting bodies are crowded together and sometime merge. The flesh is soft yet firm and it can be seen all year round but is most obvious in the autumn. It is inedible.

Fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)

The fly agaric is a large fleshy and easily-recognised fungi. Look for a bulbous base, white patches on a bright red cap and white gills. The fly agaric grows on poor sandy soils favouring birch wood but also pines. It can be found in many of the woody areas peripheral to the mountains.



Hygrocybe helobia
(and right).



Hygrocybe helobia

This is a small agaric with a reddish-orange cap about 1–3cm in diameter. The stem is between 2cm and 4cm tall. It grows in sheep-cropped grass, moss and generally poor pasture land. The youthful cap is convex and becomes more flattened with maturity. Helobia is found in small groups from late summer to late autumn, is not terribly common and is inedible.

Jelly-antler fungus (*Calocera viscosa*)

This is a very common bright yellow fungus, which can vary slightly in appearance with the fruiting body being either branched or forked. It has a sticky but firm and pliable texture. The jelly-antler fungus can be spotted growing from the end of summer right into the early winter and will be seen on rotting tree stumps or sawn off telegraph poles. It is usually between 2cm and 8cm tall.



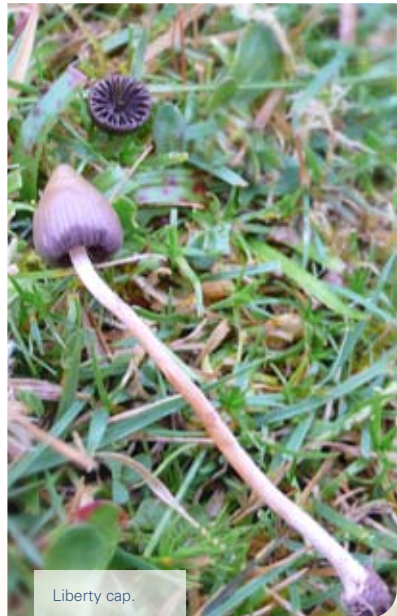
Jelly-antler fungus.

Jew's ear (*Auricularia auricula-judae*)

This spectacular purple-brown fungus is seen growing on the branches of living and dying broad-leaved trees, such as elder. It can often be seen around abandoned settlements and will grow to up to 8cm in diameter. It can spread to cover large areas of the underside of branches, away from direct sunlight. The name is actually a corruption of Judas's ear after Judas Iscariot who, it is said, hanged himself on an elder tree after his betrayal of Jesus Christ.

Liberty cap (*Psilocybe semilanceata*)

The liberty cap is a notorious little mushroom, known by some as the 'magic' mushroom. It contains the hallucinatory drug psilocybin. The liberty cap grows in areas of sheep-cropped grass and has a distinctive though not unique pointed bell-shaped cap which is 5–20mm across. The tall slender stem, reaching a height of 10cm, is quite characteristic. It can be found from late summer into the autumn and is legally a Class A drug.



Milk bonnet (*Mycena galopus*)

This grows in small groups in mixed woods and on old fire sites. *Galopus* can reach a height of 5–10cm tall with a cap 1–2cm across. It is a dark brownish-grey colour, although some of the other *galopus* are pure white. It is most definitely inedible and should have a faint smell of radish. If broken, it will extrude white milky droplets from the stem. This 'milk' gives rise to names such as the milk cap or milk bonnet.

Scarlet caterpillar fungus (*Cordyceps militaris*)

This cheesy wotsit look-a-like was spotted growing in the short sheep-cropped grass just behind Jerry's Roof in the Llanberis Pass. The scarlet caterpillar fungus is remarkable and quite rare. The reddish-orange elongated fruiting body grows to nearly 5cm long. Although all fungi grow on organic matter such as wood, leaf mulch or dung, the scarlet caterpillar fungus grows from the pupa of a moth or butterfly found just under the ground. The fungus eats the pupa: a truly parasitic fungus.

Shaggy ink cap (*Coprinus comatus*)

Coprinus comatus, also known as judge's wig or lawyer's wig, is an edible species which pops up on lawns and in roadside verges in late summer and the autumn. It is quite distinctive and not easily confused with other species. Seen here in its freshly appeared white form this fungus soon blackens and turns into an inky fluid. The young ink caps are the best for eating, try get them before they open out (and have their identity confirmed by a fungi expert). If you are brave you can bake them with eggs or create a shaggy cup ketchup.

Shiny hay cap (*Panaeolus semiovatus*)

A large and proud specimen, it stands tall in the cow dung in Snowdonia's northern mountains. The shiny hay cap can be up to 15cm tall with a cap of 5cm across. The cap is shiny when dry, hence the common name. Look out for the ring on the stem as a key to identification and the mottled gills which turn dark brown. The black edging in the photograph consists of the spores. Given its habitat, it is inedible and very unappetising!



Milk bonnet (and right).



Scarlet caterpillar fungus.



Shaggy ink caps on the lawn at Plas y Brenin.



Shiny hay cap.

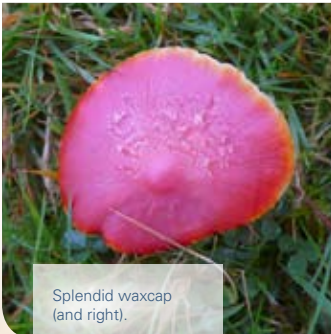


Snowy waxcap (*Hygrocybe virginea*)

This is a white, greasy agaric found in acidic areas of sheep-cropped grass and sometimes in open woodland. The cap is 1–3cm across and the stem is 2–5cm tall. Pure white when young, the *virginea* tinges ivory with age. It can be found from late summer into the autumn and is quite common. It is inedible.

Splendid waxcap (*Hygrocybe splendidissima*)

The splendid waxcap is a very distinctive red toadstool. There are some similar species with which confusion is possible; note than none of them are edible. They can be found in short cropped grass and will often sprout up in places sheep have been grazing. They have a greasy cap and pale yellow gills. They can grow up to 6cm tall with a diameter of up to 4cm.



Unknown yellow

I couldn't resist adding this fine little yellow toadstool. It was found growing in a very damp acidic bog in Cwm Clogwyn on Snowdon. It is obviously a young specimen and this makes it very difficult to identify. It might be another *Hygrocybe*.

We have trawled through our fungi resources and even our friendly expert has failed to name it. Maybe you can?

Yellowing cup (*Peziza succosa*)

There are many species in the genus *Peziza*. They all have a similar form but will be found growing in a range of habitats from woodland floors and manure to masonry and bonfire sites. The yellowing cup grows in mixed woodland and favours path-side locations. Look for large, up to 10cm in diameter, smooth brown rubber-like growth. If the flesh is broken, a watery juice seeps out and turns yellow on contact with the air. It is poisonous.

Yellowleg bonnet (*Mycena epipterygia*)

Mycena are a species of generally delicate toadstools often found in broadleaved woods. Although there are several variations in the family, the almost translucent stem is a good indicator of *Mycena epipterygia*. It grows up to 8cm tall with a cap of up to 2cm diameter. *M. epipterygia* has a bell-shaped cap which is generally yellowish brown. It is found in small groups in mossy or grassy damp places.

