

## Some poisonous mushrooms on wood or wood debris ©

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**Big laughing gym** (*Gymnopilus junonius = spectabilis*)

These mushrooms can be found in late summer and early autumn in spectacular clusters on stumps and on soil containing rotting wood. The caps are up to 18 cm in diameter and the brown gills are often covered with a dusting of rusty brown spores. There may be a ragged ring on the stalk or merely a darker zone. The smell is not unpleasant but it has a very bitter taste and content. Consumption can result in uncontrollable laughter, nausea, abdominal pain and convulsions. The mushrooms in the small photograph were found growing on wood chips that were being used to prevent injury in the grounds of a play centre.



**Sulphur tuft** (*Hypholoma = Nematoloma fasciculare*)

The sulphur tuft is found throughout the year in clusters on stumps of trees or logs. (All the other mushrooms above form mycorrhizal associations with the roots of trees and are found nowhere else.) They are about 10 cm high and up to 8 cm across and when young have sulphur yellow caps and gills. The sulphur tuft has a pleasant aroma. The symptoms of poisoning begin up to 10 hours after eating and include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and in a few cases death.



**Shaggy parasol mushroom** (*Chlorophyllum (= Macrolepiota) rhacodes*)

These robust mushrooms are up to 15 cm diameter and the stem can be up to 30 cm high and 4 cm diameter, light coloured at the top and light brown towards the base. The caps are covered in prominent chestnut coloured scales. The gills are initially white but turn light brown with age. Although it superficially resembles poisonous *Amanita* there is no cup-shaped volva at the base of the stem. Some people develop intestinal problems after eating the shaggy parasol.

In New Zealand this mushroom is often found in the litter under *Cupressus macrocarpa*.



**Cup fungi** (*Aleuria, Peziza* and other cup mushrooms)

*Aleuria, Peziza* and similar fungi produce cup-shaped fruiting bodies with the upper surface covered with tiny bottle-shaped structures that produce the spores. These mushrooms are typically found on the surface of soil or wood chips. The fruiting bodies of *Peziza vesiculosa*, *Helvella acetabulum*, and *Peziza leucomelas* (also known as *Acetabula vulgaris*) are poisonous unless cooked well first. *Sarcosphaera crassa* is considered suspect.



***Lepiota cristata* and similar species**

*Lepiota* are found growing on decaying woody or cellulosic material in forests, open areas, pasture and even compost heaps. The caps range from a few cm to 10 cm in diameter and many are ornamented with rings of scales. Some have a ring on the stem but in others this is lost by maturity.

The edibility of most species is unknown but some are considered suspect whilst *Lepiota citrophylla*, a species found in New Zealand, is poisonous possibly deadly. The poisons are cyclopeptides similar to those produced by deadly *Amanita*.



**Scaly Pholiota** (*Pholiota squarrosa*)

*Pholiota* are found in summer to late autumn at the bases of trees, on rotting stumps or logs, on burnt ground or occasionally on living trees. The yellowish to light brown caps can be up to 12 cm in diameter and either very gelatinous or scaly. Some species like the very slimy but very popular *Pholiota nameko* are edible but *Pholiota highlandensis*, *Pholiota limonella*, and *Pholiota terrestris* can cause vomiting and diarrhoea.

**IMPORTANT, READ ME** It is easy to confuse some edible and poisonous mushrooms so be absolutely sure of a mushroom's identity before eating. If you are in any doubt, throw it out. Some people can have adverse reactions to even edible mushrooms so eat just a small amount of a new mushroom the first time you try it. Keep a few of the mushrooms in your fridge just in case you need to consult a doctor later. Always store mushrooms in paper bags, never in plastic bags, and keep them cool after picking. Cook mushrooms before eating - only a few are safe to eat raw. Wash your hands after touching poisonous mushrooms. Do not put poisonous mushrooms in the same bag as those gathered for eating.

<sup>2</sup> NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL POISONS CENTRE 24 hour poison advice 0800-764 766.

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