A Pocket Guide to Common Kansas Mushrooms

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Introduction

There are over 750 species of macrofungi found within Kansas, which is minuscule compared to the 10,000+ species found throughout North America. Mushrooms are the most mystifying group of organisms on this planet, yet we know very little about them. Neither a plant or animal, they’re more closely related to lobsters than flowers. The roles they play in an ecosystem are vital and without them there would be a significant collapse in that system. They recycle nutrients by breaking down dead or dying organisms, keeping the world free from piles of dead things. They form significant symbiotic relationships with trees and other plants, connecting entire communities, acting as the telephone network for trees, and providing the plants with water and nutrients they couldn’t get on their own. Mushrooms provide medicine and food for humans, and act as our cleanup crew by breaking down oil and other pollutants. They can be parasites, assisting with controlling other species and preventing ecosystem takeovers. Mycology, the study of fungi, has yet to reveal all of the secrets held within this diverse Kingdom. Who knows what we’ll learn from these reclusive organisms?

This guide serves to introduce you to mushrooms you’re most likely to find in the Great Plains. Unfortunately, there is no rhyme or reason when it comes to identifying mushrooms and no single characteristic that connects edible species to each other. It comes down to observation, precise measurements and patience. To make matters more complicated, species can exhibit a vast range of characteristics so it’s important to refer to multiple identification guides, keys, quality internet resources, and never rely on images alone. Many images don’t capture the information needed to accurately identify mushrooms.
such as gill attachment, gill spacing, texture, time of year, location, etc. Many mushrooms can only be identified to the species level by microscopic analysis. Microscopic features are not included in this guide due to the difficulties surrounding access to equipment and there aren’t enough pages to describe the process of collecting samples and how to characterize them.

This guide is not intended to be used solely for finding and identifying edible species, but rather to further the exploration of all mushrooms. It’s organized alphabetically by scientific name as not all species have common names; those that do may have more than one common name or share a common name with an entirely different mushroom. You’ll find that common names in field guides differ radically, so it’s best to identify by scientific names. It’s important to note as more information is discovered, scientific names change so old field guides may have different names for certain mushrooms than newer ones. Many species have look-a-likes and should be carefully compared, especially if that species is considered edible. Even after careful comparison, it’s advisable to get a second opinion before consuming mushrooms. You never know how you’ll react to something even if your friend has had no issues; think of peanut allergies as an analogy for this.

When it comes to forays, or looking for mushrooms, time of year, location, moisture and temperature all play a factor. Fungi thrive on moisture so you’re more likely to find mushrooms after it rains. Most species require specific temperatures for them to produce fruiting bodies (mushrooms), so warmer temperatures are ideal, but too much heat can be detrimental. Spring and fall will yield the highest diversity. Western Kansas tends to be drier and open prairie, whereas eastern Kansas gets more rainfall and
has more trees. Diversity increases across the state as you move to the east, so you’re more likely to find more fungus the further east you go. So get out there, go for a walk and discover something new about your local park, favorite trail, or even your own backyard.

Groups

Some mushrooms may look similar but that does not necessarily mean they are related. The following depictions and descriptions describe basic characteristics that species may share.

Bird’s nest fungi (Cyathus, crucibulum): a pea-size cup, often filled with “eggs.” These eggs are actually called peridioles and house the spores.

Amanitas (Amanita):
Pale gilled mushrooms with remnants of a universal veil in the form of a sac at the base. Many have a ring or skirt on the stem.

Boletes (Boletus and allies):
Instead of gills, underside of cap has tubes with pore-like openings.
Puffballs (Calvatia, Lycoperdon): roundish; powdery spores form inside the ball and escape in a puff of smoke.

Conks (Ganoderma and allies): thick, woody shelves that grow on tree trunks and look like flat conch shells.

Earthstars (Geastrum): the outer skin breaks and peels back to form a star.

Corals (Ramaria and allies): typically branched like coral; some are coral in color as well.

Inkies (Coprinus): when old, the caps liquefy into an inky goo.

Jellies (Tremella and allies): like jelly or rubber when fresh or wet.

Milkies (Lactarius): exude a milky latex when cut.

Morels (Morchella): conelike head honeycombed with brain-like ridges and pits.

Puffballs (Calvatia, Lycoperdon): roundish; powdery spores form inside the ball and escape in a puff of smoke.
Identification Characteristics

This list introduces you to the absolute basics of what to look for when you encounter an unknown mushroom. It should not be used as a key as it will not lead you to a specific species or group of mushrooms.

Observation is the most important part of correctly identifying mushrooms. These can be evaluated in any order.

- Determine where the mushroom is located.
- If located near or on a tree, make note of the species of tree.
- Is it found in the woods, open grassland, or mixture?
- What is it growing on?
  - Wood, terrestrial (out of the ground), on a living tree, on an insect, on a leaf or woodchip, etc.
    1. If found growing on the ground, dig a little below and around it to determine if

Scarlet cups (Sarcoscypha): bright red and more or less cup shaped.

Stinkhorns (Phallus and allies): a stalk like a phallus and putrid smelling.

Spine fungi (Hericium and allies): instead of gills or pores, many toothlike spines that hang down like icicles.
it’s growing on buried wood or other material.
2. If growing on a tree, is it growing at the base of the tree, on the trunk, on a branch, high up on the trunk, etc.?
   • Consider the time of year (spring, summer, fall, winter). Think about the amount of moisture the area has recently experienced.
   • Touch it.
   • Is it fuzzy, slimy, dry, smooth, spiny, hairy, scaly, waxy, gelatinous, or some other texture?
   • When you touch it, does it bruise?
     i. If it bruises does it change colors?
        What color is it?
     ii. If you cut it, does it turn a different color?
        What color is it?
   • Look closely.
   • Does it have a cap?
     i. Does it have gills, pores, folds, or is it smooth on the underside?
     ii. Does the cap have fine hairs, scales, patches, or any evidence of a universal veil?
     iii. Can the top layer of the cap be easily peeled back from the cap?
   • Is it cup-like?
   • Is it a round ball?
   • Does it have a skirt or ring on the stalk?
   • Does it have a volva (sack) at the base of the stalk?
   • Does it look like a star?
   • Does the stalk/stem have any texture to it? Is it covered in a fine powder, hairy, slimy, smooth, etc.?
     i. What color is the stalk? Does it change color as you move up or down?
     ii. Does it change shape?
     iii. When you slice into it, is it hollow, fleshy, have holes/pockets throughout, or have strands of fiber inside?
• Smell it.
• Make note of the odor or lack thereof.
• What is the shape of the cap?
  • Cylindrical, bell-shaped, conical, convex, flat, vase-like, shallowly depressed, or does it have a knob in the middle of the cap?
• How are the gills attached? See pg. 8.
• How are the gills spaced? See pg. 8.
• Look for colors.
• What color is the cap?
• What color are the gills?
• What color is the stem?
• Does it change colors when you slice into it or bruise it?
• Look for remains of a universal veil in the form of patches, warts, or scales on the cap and/or stem
• Make a spore print, see pg. 9.

**Gill Attachment**

![Gill Attachment Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

- distant
- free
- adnexeled
- adnate
- notched
- decurrent

© Rachel Roth

**Gill Spacing**

![Gill Spacing Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

- Distant
- Close
- Crowded

© Lyndzee Rhine
How to Make a Spore Print

Mushroom spores come in all colors, ranging from white and black to pink and purple and everything in between. Determining the color of the spores can help identify a mushroom. Spores are the microscopic packets of genetic information mushrooms use to reproduce. Even though they’re invisible to the naked eye, you can see the color by making a spore print. To make a spore print, follow these simple steps:

1. If a stem is present, carefully cut it away from the cap and avoid damaging the gills.
2. Place the mushroom cap, gills facing down on a piece of glass. Most sites and guides advise paper but with glass you can see the color more clearly and not worry about them blending in with the paper.
3. Cover it with something to protect it from any drafts.
4. Leave it for a couple of hours or even overnight.
5. Gently remove the cover and the spent cap from the glass to reveal a beautiful – and delicate – spore print.

Mushrooms that don’t have gills produce spores via other structures but may still provide a sport print with a little practice.

A spore print from Amanita prairiicola, collected in August, 2019.

© Lyndzee Rhine
**Agaricus campestris** – Meadow Mushroom

**Description:**
- **CAP:** 3-11 cm across; convex, occasionally nearly flat; whitish; bald and glossy to silky to nearly wooly or scaly.
- **GILLS:** Free from the stem; deep pink becoming brown with maturity; crowded; covered with a thin, white partial veil in button stage.
- **STEM:** 2-6 cm long; 1-2.5 cm thick; sometimes tapering slightly to base; with a quickly collapsing white ring; whitish; not bruising. Flesh is thick and white throughout; sometimes, but rarely, changing to pinkish in wet weather.
- **SPORE PRINT:** Brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Grows in meadows, fields, lawns and grassy areas; alone, gregariously or sometimes in fairy rings; March to October. Very common and found widely throughout the state.

**Comments:** Good field characteristics to look for include growing in grass, whitish cap, short stature, pink, immature gills, and lack of bruising reactions. *Agaricus porphyrocephalus* is similar but features a brown cap.
Amanita fulva – Tawny Grisette

**Description:**

**CAP:** 4-10 cm across, and oval at first but becomes convex to nearly flat with a bump in the center. The cap is sticky when young (or when it gets wet) and orange-brown in color, sometimes with a few white patches scattered about. The edge of the cap is noticeably grooved.

**GILLS:** Free from the stem but can be slightly attached to it, close together and white.

**STEM:** 7-16 cm and 0.5-1.5 cm thick, wider at the base and tapering toward the cap. It’s bald, and lacks an annulus/ring. Look for a white volva/sack at the base that fits loosely around the stem and can discolor to an orange-brown.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with hardwoods and conifers from July to October.

**Comments:** The cap color can vary but tends to hover in the orange-brown range. Compare with *A. vaginata*, which has a gray cap.
Amanita rubescens – The Blusher

**Description:**
- **CAP:** 4-20 cm broad and convex when young to broadly convex or flat with maturity. It’s dry or can be slightly sticky. When it is young, it’s a pale bronze color or brown that takes on red tones with maturity; eventually it will turn a red-brown color or remain a brown color. It also has yellow warts when young but the warts soon fade to pink, gray or dull tan/brown. Sometimes it will have a central knob.
- **GILLS:** Free from the stem or just barely attached to it, close together and white, sometimes taking on a slightly red hue.
- **STEM:** 5-14 cm long and can be 1.5-3 cm thick and may have a slightly enlarged base. There is a fragile, skirt-like ring that usually persists in maturity. Sometimes there may be a few scales or zones indicating a volva. The stem is white but stains pinkish to brownish red.
- **SPORE PRINT:** White.
- **GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with hardwoods but it favors oak trees, can sometimes be seen with conifers. Found from May to October.
- **Comments:** A good field identifier is all parts of the mushroom will bruise a reddish brown color whereas *A. flavorubescens* only bruises on the lower part of the stem. *A. flavorubescens* is poisonous and is very similar to *A. rubescens.*
Amanita thiersii – Thiers’ Lepidella

**Description:**

**CAP:** 5-20 cm across, convex becoming more flat with age and covered with a powdery/shaggy, sticky material from the universal veil. It’s also white and may have universal veil remnants hanging from the edge of the cap.

**GILLS:** Nearly free, close together and white.

**STEM:** 8-20 cm long and 1-2 cm wide, covered in the same material as the cap with a skirt-like ring. If a volva is present, it will be powdery like the rest of the mushroom, but probably indistinct.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic; can be found growing in lawns and grassy areas either alone, scattered, gregariously or in fairy rings/partial rings. It flourishes in open grassy areas and warm weather, so it’s found from July to September.

**Comments:** This is a large, common, and noticeable mushroom. Most mushrooms in the genus Amanita are mycorrhizal but *A. thiersii* is saprobic and therefore not associated with trees. One of the most frequently encountered species in the summer as it grows in lawns and ditches in hard to miss groupings. Compare with *Chlorophyllum molybdites* (pg. 25) which lacks a powdery, sticky coating and has a greenish spore print but is also very commonly found in grassy areas like yards.
Description:
CAP: 2.5-7 cm but can get up to 15 cm across, convex but flattening with age. The cap is dry or tacky and the color varies quite a bit but is typically honey-yellow and may have a few tiny dark scales near the center.
GILLS: Attached or barely begin to run down the stem and are nearly distant. They’re whitish, sometimes will bruise a darker color. When young, they’re covered by a whitish, partial veil.
STEM: 5-20 cm long and 0.5-3.5 cm thick, the stem tapers toward the base and it’s tough and fibrous. It’s bald and pale near the cap but darkens toward the base and can be a bit on the hairy side; the ring is persistent with maturity.
SPORE PRINT: White.
GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Disease causing (pathogenic) and parasitic on living hardwoods but sometimes found on conifers. They can also be saprobic on deadwood. They can be found growing in large clusters from August to November. They especially thrive on rainy, fall days.
Comments: Compare carefully with Galerina marginata (poisonous) (pg. 33). This species spreads by black root-like rhizomorphs and they can be seen by peeling back bark (please avoid doing this as it is harmful to the tree). They will also bioluminesce, producing their own light through a chemical reaction, and are responsible for the glowing wood known as “foxfire.” Compare with Armillariella tabescens, which lacks an annulus.
Artomyces pyxidatus – Crown Coral or Crown-Tipped Coral Fungus

Description:
FRUITING BODY: 4-13 cm high, 2-10 cm across and branches repeatedly. A hallmark characteristic for this species are the crown-like tips that usually have 3-6 points surrounding a shallow depression on each branch. Each branch is 1-5 mm thick, smooth and whitish to pale yellow at first but may darken with age. The branches sit on a short, brown base that sports brown hairs.

SPORE PRINT: White.

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Most coral fungi are terrestrial; A. pyxidatus is an exception to that as it’s saprobic and grows on fallen wood. It may appear to be terrestrial so look for buried wood; it prefers aspens, willows and maples. It most often grows from June to September when the weather is dry.

Comments: Good field characteristics include growing from wood and crown tips on the branches. Formerly known as Clavicoronoa pyxidata.
Auricularia sp. – Tree or Wood Ear

**Description:**
CAP: Does not have a true cap or stem and has no gills.

STEM: Wavy and irregular; typically ear-shaped; 2-15 cm wide. Usually found clumped together and attached at a central or lateral position. Gelatinous in texture, tan to brown in color. The “upper” part of the mushroom is silky/downy, veined. The flesh is thin.

**Spore Print:** White.

**Growth and Distribution:** Found March to October. Saprobic on dead wood, they especially prefer hickories. Found widely throughout Kansas.

**Comments:** Compare it with *Exidia recisa* which is visually similar. *A. auricula* is considered edible. They will dry out and become hard and crusty, but as soon as there is a bit of moisture they reconstitute.
**Bisporella citrina** – Yellow Fairy Cup or Lemon Discos

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** This small cup fungus can be up to 3 mm across and is disc or saucer shaped; bald, smooth, and is usually found without a stem although a tiny one may be present. This little fungus is bright yellow.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on decaying logs and stumps of hardwoods and conifers. It grows in dense clusters from October to December.

**Comments:** The individual fruiting bodies are very small but the large clusters make them stand out in the woods. It can appear on almost any kind of deadwood, including fence posts, old furniture, etc. Some jelly fungi can appear to be similar (Genus *Dacrymyces*) but they have more gelatinous fruiting bodies.
Boletinellus merulioides – Ash Tree Bolete

**Description:**
**CAP:** 5-20 cm and convex when young. With age, they become irregular, wavy and nearly bowl-like with an in-rolled margin. The top of the cap is light to dark brown, sometimes reddish brown. The cap is dry or tacky when wet. It has the feeling of soft leather but gets tough with maturity.

**PORE SURFACE/UNDERSIDE:** Runs down the stem and has radially elongated pores, sometimes looking like gills. The pores are yellow to olive and bruise brownish to almost blue. The tube layer does not separate from the top of the cap.

**STEM:** 2-4 cm long and up to 2.5 cm thick. It’s off-center and yellowish toward the cap but changes to brown near the base and bruises a darker brown.

**SPORE PRINT:** Olive brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Found under ash trees (mostly green ash) and have an interesting symbiotic relationship with the leafcurl ash aphid (see comments). This species is found growing alone, scattered, or gregariously from May to October.

**Comments:** Gyrodon merulioides is a synonym. This species forms little knots of mycelial tissue that surrounds and protects the leafcurl ash aphid; the aphid gives the fungus nutrients. The presence of this species suggests your ash tree may have some unwanted pests. Compare with Paragyrodon sphaerosporus, which can look superficially similar, but has a volva-like ring around the base of the stem.
**Boletus campestris** – Field Bolete

**Description:**

**CAP:** 2-4 cm, beginning as convex but becoming nearly flat with maturity. It is dry, bald or finely velvety and the rosy to brick red surface may crack with age, especially toward the edges of the cap. The color may fade slightly.

**PORE SURFACE/UNDERSIDE:** Yellow but becomes greenish yellow; it will quickly bruise blue/bluegreen; 1-3 pore per mm, each pore is about 1 cm deep.

**STEM:** 3-7 cm in length, 0.5-1 cm thick, yellow toward the cap but changing to about the same color as the cap toward the base, solid throughout and will have yellowish mycelial strands attached to the base.

**SPORE PRINT:** Olive brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with hardwoods but tends to prefer oaks. Typically found in open, grassy areas but also in the woods. Found growing alone, scattered, or gregariously from May to September. Most often found in the eastern part of the state.

**Comments:** It can be virtually impossible to distinguish this little red bolete from at least four other species but feel free to try and compare it to *Boletus bicolor* or *Boletus rubellus* (which may or may not be strictly a European species, mycologists aren’t sure yet).
Calocera cornea – Club-Like Tuning Fork

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** Cylindrical with rounded or pointed tips. They stand about 2 cm high and 3 mm wide; they’re bald and slick, firmly gelatinous and orange yellow in color. When they dry out they turn a reddish brown color and become hard.

**SPORE PRINT:** Yellow.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on barkless deadwood, it favors oaks. It can be found growing in clusters from late summer to early fall.

**Comments:** Individual clusters of this species look almost like antlers and some may fork near the tip but they rarely branch, making this species look more like a club fungi but with microscopic inspection it falls in line with other jelly fungi. They are more easily found after long rains. If they dry out they have the ability to revive with moisture. Compare with *Dacryopinax spathularia*, which has more of a spatula shape than a horn shape. Also, be aware of coral fungi which are larger and more brittle.
Calvatia craniiformis – Brain Puffball

Description:
FRUITING BODY: Can be quite large (8-20 cm across), though it is not the largest puffball. 6-20 cm tall, and skull shaped. It sits on a sterile base that may resemble a “neck.” Bright white when young and bald. The outer skin will crack and begin to slough away with age, revealing the powdery, brown spore mass it protected.

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic and found growing terrestrially either alone or gregariously. It favors lawns and ditches but can also be found growing in meadows or among leaf litter in the woods. Generally, it grows from March to November, but it’s important to note mature bodies may persist year-round.

Comments: Edible when fresh and young but be sure to slice it in half and make sure there are no traces of yellow or brown inside. If there is a slight discoloration in the white flesh inside, do not consume it. Compare with Calvatia cyathiformis see pg. 23.
Calvatia cyathiformis – Purple-Spored Puffball

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** 5-20 cm across, beginning round but becoming more upside-down pear-shaped, or it may develop a flattened top with a narrower base, like a “neck.” It is whitish to tan/brownish, bald with a fairly well-developed sterile base (the neck part). When sliced, the flesh is white becoming yellowish and eventually donning a dull purple to purplish brown hue and is very powdery. The outside of the fruiting body will crack to reveal the purple powdery spore mass.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic, usually found growing in grassy areas like lawns, meadows, etc., and either alone, scattered, gregariously or even sometimes in fairy rings. It’s found growing from June to October but the mature fruiting body may persist year-round.

**Comments:** When young, they are edible, but be sure to cut into it to make sure there is no discoloration in the white flesh. If there is, it is no longer edible, and you shouldn’t eat it. Compare with *Calvatia craniiformis* (pg. 22), which has a yellow brown or olive spore mass. A form exists in central and western KS, sometimes called *C. fragilis* but is smaller and features a less obvious sterile base.
Cantharellus sp. – Chanterelle

**Description:** This description is a compilation of Midwestern chanterelles, several of which are separated as distinct species. They are difficult to distinguish at the species level, but most have the same general description without looking at them microscopically.

**CAP:** 1.5-15 cm across; more or less convex, often with an inrolled margin; becoming flat or shallowly depressed, with a wavy or irregular margin. Tacky when wet. Bald or with a few fibers; usually pale yellow to egg-yolk yellow to almost orange.

**GILLS:** Well-developed false gills that have cross-veins. These gills run down the stem and are similar in color to the cap or paler. Sometimes they will stain brownish to orangish.

**STEM:** 2.5-8 cm long and 1-2 cm thick. Can be extremely variable in shape (from thin, to thick and stocky). The stem is bald below the false gills and is colored similar to the cap. When sliced into, the flesh is white and does not change. Smells like apricots.

**SPORE PRINT:** Pale yellow to creamy white.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with hardwoods, they tend to favor oaks. Can be found growing alone, gregariously or in small clusters from June to October and widely distributed in Kansas.

**Comments:** Edible but carefully compare with Omphalotus illudens (Jack O' Lantern Mushroom), which is considered poisonous. *O. illudens* grows in large clusters on stumps or buried wood, have true gills that run down the stem, and are more orange in color than yellow.
**Chlorophyllum molybdites – Green Spored Parasol, The Vomiter**

**Description:**

**CAP:** 10-40 cm; convex to conical when young, becoming convex to mostly flat in age; the cap is dry and nearly bald when it’s young, but it soon develops brown to pinkish-brown scales that can be uplifted or flat and tend to concentrate near the center. The cap can be whitish to tan or yellowish white.

**GILLS:** Free from the stem; close together; white when young but becomes grayish green to brownish green with maturity. Be wary, sometimes the gills will stay white well into maturity.

**STEM:** 5-25 cm long and 1.5-2.5 cm thick; bald; firm; white, sometimes discoloring to slightly brownish; has a persisting, double-edged ring. When sliced into, the flesh is white throughout, not usually staining, but if it does the stain will be reddish brown to pale pinkish red, or almost orange.

**SPORE PRINT:** Dull green.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Found throughout Kansas from June to October. Saprobic. Commonly grow in lawns and ditches in urban areas, growing gregariously and often found in troops or fairy rings.

**Comments:** Poisonous. This mushroom causes the most poisonings in North America due to its similar appearance to Agaricus campestris (see pg. 11). These are large and hard-to-miss mushrooms, often found growing in yards and ditches.
**Coprinellus micaceus** – Mica Cap

**Description:**

**CAP:** 2-15 cm, oval when young, expanding to convex or bell-shaped. They’re honey brown, tawny, amber or sometimes paler in color, and as they age they can get even more pale. In the button stage, they are covered with mica-like granules that frequently wash off with moisture. The margin is slightly lined or grooved.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem or free from it; pale colored becoming brown to black. They can be close or crowded. This species will deliquesce slightly, but not completely.

**STEM:** 2-8 cm long, 3-6 cm thick, bald or very finely hairy. The stem is white, fibrous, and hollow.

**SPORE PRINT:** Black.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic. Growing in clusters on decaying wood (the wood may be buried, making them appear terrestrial). Frequently found in urban areas but also woods, too. Found March to May and September to October.

**Comments:** Also known as *Coprinus micaceus*. They prefer plenty of moisture and the cluster sizes can be quite astonishing.
Coprinopsis variegata – Scaly Ink Cap

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-3 cm across but can reach up to 7.5 cm. It starts out oval and expands to look like a bell. When young, it is whitish but turns to a gray color with age, and it’s covered in large, loose scales/patches that can be whitish to somewhat yellow.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem but may also be free from it and crowded together. They begin as white but turn grayish to purple-gray and then eventually black with maturity. Once they turn black, they will begin to deliquesce and turn into a black goo.

**STEM:** 4-12 cm long and can be 1 cm thick, felty or wooly, white, and hollow. Sometimes a partial veil will remain but rarely are they found with rings around the stem when mature. The base of the stem will have brown mycelial strands attached to it, acting almost like an anchor to the rotting hardwood.

**SPORE PRINT:** Black or blackish brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic and found growing gregariously or in clusters on decaying hardwood logs well into the decaying process. It tends to fruit from May to October.

**Comments:** Similar to *Coprinus comatus* (Shaggy Mane) (pg. 28) except it’s found growing on rotting logs and has noticeable brown scales rather than a shaggy appearance. The Shaggy Mane is also much larger. Most easily found after a good rain.
**Coprinus comatus – Shaggy Mane**

**Description:**

**CAP:** 3-15 cm, oval to cylindrical when young but expanding to bell-shaped with the edge of the cap lifting with age. The cap is dry, whitish in color with possibly a light brown center and covered in large, shaggy scales. As they mature, the edges begin to turn black and appear to ooze an ink-like substance. This is known as deliquescing and the cap is essentially digesting itself to release spores. The cap is also dry, whitish, possibly with a light brown center and covered in large, shaggy scales.

**GILLS:** Free from the stem, white at first but become black as they deliquese. They’re very crowded together.

**STEM:** 2-20 cm long and 1-2 cm thick. It is bald and silky, white and very easily separated from the cap. An important field characteristic lies with the movable ring around the stem.

**SPORE PRINT:** Black.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic, frequently found growing in yards, on woodchips, hard-packed dirt and often in freshly disturbed ground. They can be found growing alone, in clusters or sometimes in fairy rings from May to October, although they can be found in the early spring during particularly warm spells.

**Comments:** VERY CAREFULLY compare with Amanita thiersii (pg. 14) and Chlorophyllum molybdites (pg. 25), which are poisonous. A. thiersii and C. molybdites also grow in lawns and meadows but are noticeably different by size alone. If you’re not sure about the identification, slice the stem in half lengthwise and look for strands of fiber inside the hollow stem. This is a defining field characteristic of C. comatus.
Crucibulum laeve – Common Bird’s Nest

Description:
FRUITING BODY: 5-8 mm high and up to 15 mm across. When young, they are shaped like an upside-down vase to roundish, and closed with a thin, fragile “lid.” As they mature, they become cup-shaped and the “lid” disappears. The outer surface is yellowish at first, but can darken to nearly brown with age and is velvety or nearly bald. The inner surface is smooth and shiny and either white or grayish. Peridioles are 2 mm wide and shaped like flattened balls; very tough and have tiny cords attached to them (difficult to see); pale and whitish in color.

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic. Found growing alone, scattered or densely gregariously on woodland debris (sticks, leaves, nutshells, needles, etc.), woodchips, old furniture, and even scat, but not typically found on bare soil or large logs, they prefer smaller organic matter. Found throughout Kansas from May to October.

Comments: This is the most common species of bird’s nest fungi found in Kansas and throughout the Midwest. Compare with Cyathus striatus which features a distinctly grooved or lined inner surface with a shaggy or wooly outer surface.
Cyathus stercoreus – Dung-Loving Bird’s Nest

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** Average 1 cm tall and a little less than 1 cm across, cup-like. The outer surface is brown to cinnamon, hairy/shaggy but may lose the hair with maturity. The inner surface of the “cup” is shiny, lacks hair, and is dark brown. When young, they have a white “lid” that soon disappears revealing the “eggs.” The “eggs” are known as peridioles and are 1-2 mm wide, disc shaped, black, and attached to cords. The cords can be difficult to see unless the “eggs” have been flung from the cup.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on organic debris like straw, scat, etc., but they’re often found in woodchips. They can be growing gregariously or in dense clusters from May to August and given the right conditions may grow in greenhouses over the winter.

**Comments:** These are often referred to as the Bird Nest fungi for their resemblance to bird nests. This common name is used for all species with this description. Compare with *Cyathus striatus*, which has striations inside the cup, giving it a striped look. Bird Nest fungi, like cup fungi, rely on water to disperse their spores. A water droplet will hit the cup and fling the peridioles out into the world. Inside the packets are thousands of spores that burst out of the “egg” when they dry out.
Daedaleopsis confragosa – Thin-Walled Maze Polypore or Blushing Bracket

**Description:**

**CAP:** 5-15 cm, mostly flat and semicircular in shape. It’s dry, bald (or may have fine hairs) and pale grayish to brown or even reddish brown. It usually has zones of colors.

**PORE SURFACE/UNDERSIDE:** Exhibits quite a bit of variability, the pores can be angular, elongated or maze-like with the walls between the pores being generally thin. To make things more difficult, they sometimes resemble gills! Initially, the pores are white when young but become brown with age; when fresh it will bruise a salmon-pink color. It lacks a stem.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on decaying hardwood but is rarely found growing out of wounds on a living tree. It favors birches and willows, rarely appearing on oaks. It fruits in the springtime, but because it’s hardy it will persist throughout the year.

**Comments:** This species can look significantly different among individual fruitings. Compare with *Daedalea quercina*, which has much thicker walls between the pores and grows on oaks, and *Trametes elegans* which is all white and seems to have “normal” pores.
**Flammulina velutipes – The Velvet Foot**

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-7 cm, and mostly convex, but tends to flatten out with maturity and is moist or sticky, and bald. The color of this mushroom can be fairly variable from dark orange brown to yellowish brown.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem, whitish to pale yellow and crowded close together.

**STEM:** 2-11 cm long and 3-5 mm thick, sometimes the stem can be larger toward the base; it is pale to yellowish-brown or orange-brown and covered in a velvety coating that darkens as you move from the base toward the cap.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on stumps, logs, roots and living wood of hardwoods. They can look terrestrial when they’re actually attached to buried wood. Found throughout Kansas from January to April and October to December, they seem to prefer growing in wounds on living trees.

**Comments:** They’re the wild equivalent to “enoki,” which is a cultivated variety found in grocery stores. Compare this with *Xeromphalina tenuipes* which has a dry cap and brownish-orange fuzz on the stem. Also compare carefully with *Galerina marginata* (see pg. 33), which are poisonous.
**Galerina marginata – The Deadly Galerina**

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-4 cm, convex or nearly flat but can be bell-shaped; sticky when wet or fresh, otherwise it is dry and bald. Brown to tawny brown sometimes fading to yellowish or tan.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem or running slightly down it; they’re close together and yellowish at first, eventually becoming a rusty brown color. Sometimes the gills may pull away from the stem as it ages. They do not bruise and are covered in a whitish, partial veil when young.

**STEM:** 2-10 cm long and 3-6 mm thick, dry and hollow. Sometimes a fragile ring may be present; because it’s fragile there may be no evidence of a ring.

**SPORE PRINT:** Rusty brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on rotting wood of hardwoods and conifers, growing in clusters or gregariously, but rarely found alone. Most frequently found in the fall but also found in spring, summer and winter during warm spells, January to May and October to December.

**Comments:** This mushroom is deadly poisonous. Sometimes called *Galerina autumnalis*. This species should be properly identified by anyone who collects mushrooms. Main features to look for include rusty-brown spore print, growing on rotting wood in clusters, a thin ring or ring zone, and a brown to tawny cap. Compare carefully with *Armillaria sp.* which have white spore prints.
Ganoderma sessile – Reishi or Lingzhi

**Description:**

**CAP:** 2-16 cm across, 4-8 cm thick and irregularly shaped, kidney-like at maturity and can be fan-shaped. It has a shiny, varnished surface often with lumpy zones near the attachment point. When young it’s quite striking with bright, colorful zones ranging from white to yellow to red. Not usually found with a stem but this species is known to break that rule.

**PORE SURFACE/UNDERSIDE:** Whitish but becomes a dingy brown color with age, usually bruising a darker brown with 2-4 really tiny pores per mm.

**SPORE PRINT:** Reddish brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Parasitic on living hardwood trees (growing from wounds) and saprobic on dead deciduous trees. It can be found growing alone or in groups and it fruits all year round.

**Comments:** Similar in appearance to Ganoderma crustisii which always has a stem. The species name *G. sessile* means “without a stem.” This species is often referred to as Ling Chih which means “divine mushroom of immortality;” Asian cultures use this mushroom frequently for medicinal purposes.
Geastrum saccatum – Rounded Earthstar

Description:
FRUITING BODY: When young, it’s bald and egg-shaped with a pointed beak. 2-3 cm wide and attached to the substrate by a point at the base. With maturity, the outer “shell” of the egg splits open and forms 4-9 buff-colored “arms” that lay out, resembling a star. The spore case can be 2-3 cm wide, bald, and brownish to purple brown with a beak surrounded by a depression usually paler than the surrounding area, like a bullseye. The case sits directly on the arms, as though in a bowl (without a pedestal).

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic, growing alone or gregariously under trees. Found throughout Kansas from March to November. The fruiting body may persist and can be found year-round.

Comments: Compare with Geastrum triplex which is larger and features thick arms that crack with age.
Gymnopus dryophilus – Oak-Loving Collybia

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-7.5 cm, when young it is convex with the edges rolling under slightly. As it ages, it becomes more flat. It’s moist, bald, and dark reddish brown to brown when young but becomes tan to orangish brown or paler.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem or free from it, white and crowded.

**STEM:** 1-10 cm long and 2-7 mm thick and flexible. It is dry, fibrous, bald, hollow and lighter toward the gills but darkens near the base.

**SPORE PRINT:** White, creamy or pale yellowish white.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on forest floor debris. Found growing alone, scattered or gregariously under hardwoods and/or conifers from May to October.

**Comments:** *Collybia dryophila* is a synonym. Its common name suggests that it prefers oaks, but that’s not always the case. Just know it prefers hardwood forests. It can be parasitized by a jelly fungi called *Syzygospora mycetophila*, Collybia Jelly, where it forms jelly-like masses on the cap and stem.
**Gyromitra brunnea** – Carolina False Morel, Big Red, False Morel or Beefsteak

**Description:**

**CAP:** 4-8 cm across and varies in shape. It often features 2-4 randomly arranged lobes pinched together in a saddle-shape, and it has fairly well-defined seams. It’s tan to reddish brown in color. The underside of the lobes are whitish and visible in some places without having to lift the lobes up. If you cut it open, you’ll find white flesh that has holes throughout it, like a sponge.

**STEM:** 2-9 cm long, 2-5 cm thick, irregular in shape but usually enlarged toward the base. It starts out as pale-pinkish but turns white with age. If you cut into the stem, you’ll find thick, white flesh that’s pocked throughout with chambers.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic and/or possibly mycorrhizal and typically found under hardwood trees but it favors oaks. It’s typically found growing alone or in small groups March to April and often confused with true morel mushrooms (see comments).

**Comments:** Compare carefully with *Morchella sp.* (pg. 45). False morels contain a toxin known as gyromitrin, that when consumed is converted to monomethylhydrazine (rocket fuel), so all *Gyromitra sp.* are considered inedible. This is considered a false morel and grows just before or near the beginning of morel season. This is the most frequently encountered false morel in Kansas. It has been referred to as *Gyromitra fastigiata*, but recent studies have determined that *G. fastigiata* is a European species introduced to the American Southwest.
**Lactarius hygrophoroides – Hygrophorous Milky**

**Description:**

**CAP:** 3-10 cm across, beginning as convex but becomes flat with maturity; often found with a shallow dip in the center or it can be vase-shaped. It is very finely velvety, dry and evenly colored a dull orange to cinnamon-orange.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem and may run slightly down it. They’re distantly spaced, whitish at first, becoming cream-colored or pale yellow with maturity. Sometimes it stains a brown color if damaged.

**STEM:** 3-5 cm long, 0.5-1.5 cm thick and colored like the cap; it is bald or very finely velvety, similar to the cap. If you cut it open, you’ll find solid, white flesh throughout.

**NOTE:** Species in the genus *Lactarius* exude a milky substance when they are injured. *L. hygrophoroides* exudes a copious amount of white milk that does not often stain surfaces but may stain white paper a yellow color if left overnight.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal under hardwoods but prefers oak trees. It can be found growing scattered or gregariously from June to September.

**Comments:** Compare with *Lactarius volemus*, which has close gills that always stain brown. It has a rather fishy odor.
**Lactarius glaucescens** – Blancaccio

**Description:**

**CAP:** 4-11 cm; convex but becoming flat or vase-shaped with age. It is dry, bald, soft and white to whitish, sometimes becoming slightly yellow or brown with age.

**GILLS:** Run down the stem slightly, very crowded, and pale cream in color. They frequently fork.

**STEM:** 3-10 cm long, 1-2 cm thick, white, bald and solid. This mushroom secretes a milky substance when injured; the substance is white but slowly changes to olive green or pastel green. This milk will stain white paper yellow.

**SPORE PRINT:** Creamy white.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with oaks and other hardwoods; growing scattered, gregariously or sometimes in dense troops, they seem to frequent moss. Found throughout Kansas from June to September.

**Comments:** This mushroom has caused gastrointestinal poisonings, so it is considered poisonous. Also known as *Lactarius glaucescens*. Compare with *Lactarius piperatus*, the difference lies with the milk, which does not turn green. Also compare with *L. subvellereus*, which has a velvety cap and widely spaced gills, it exudes white latex that dries pale yellow.
Lycoperdon marginatum – Peeling Puffball

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** This is a small puffball 1-5 cm across; it develops a flattened top with age and has a pinched underside, kind of like the knot of a balloon. Initially, it’s covered in whitish warts close together and kind of spiky. With maturity these spikes begin to break apart in patches and slough away in chunks, revealing an inner skin brown and thin like a paper bag. When young, the inside is filled with dense, white flesh that becomes olive to brownish and exudes a spore dust when poked (or rained on, but poking is more fun).

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic, under deciduous trees and conifers but can also be found in urban areas, breaking down leaf/needle litter. It can grow alone, scattered or gregariously from May to September.

**Comments:** Compare with *Lycoperdon perlatum* (pg. 41), which is much larger, and *Vasceullum curtisii* that has larger white spikes and does not lose the outer layer.
Description:
**FRUITING BODY**: Shaped like an upside-down pear with a fairly prominent stem, it has a roundish top that can be flattish. It’s usually between 2.5-7 cm wide, 3-7.5 cm tall, dry and covered with whitish spines when young and fresh, but the spines usually fall off by maturity. The spines leave behind scars on the outer surface. This mushroom is white but later turns a tan/brown color. The interior is white and fleshy when young but changes to yellowish to olive and becomes granular; eventually it is filled with a brownish spore dust.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION**: Saprobic and is usually found under both deciduous and coniferous trees in the woods, but it is also found along roadsides and in urban settings. It can be seen growing alone, scattered, gregariously or in clusters and is found from June to November.

**Comments**: Edible when young as the flesh is still white and firm, but becomes inedible when the inside begins to change colors. Likely the most common puffball in North America.
Marasmius oreades – Scotch Bonnet, Fairy Ring Mushroom

**Description:**
**CAP:** 1-5 cm across, bell shaped with the edges being somewhat rolled inward when young. As it matures, the cap becomes broadly convex and the edges are no longer rolled-in but can be uplifted. It often maintains a small, central bump. It’s dry, bald, and pale tan – occasionally white or reddish tan. As it dries out the color can change dramatically, resulting in a mushroom that is two different colors.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem or free from it, distantly spaced, white or pale tan.

**STEM:** 2-8 cm long, 1.5-6 mm thick, dry, tough but flexible, whitish or colored like the cap.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic and found growing gregariously in troops, rings or partial rings. It prefers lawns, meadows, and other grassy areas and is found from April to October.

**Comments:** Though this mushroom is sometimes called the “fairy ring mushroom,” it can be misleading because there are several other species that also fruit in rings. This causes confusion with species that are poisonous.
Marasmius rotula – Pinwheel Mushroom, The Pinwheel Marasmius, The Little Wheel, The Collared Parachute, or The Horsehair Fungus

**Description:**

**CAP:** Small, 0.5-2 cm, convex and pleated. The cap is also bald, dry and white except for a central depression that is brownish.

**GILLS:** Attached to a tiny collar that’s attached to the stem. They are white to yellowish-white.

**STEM:** Thin and wiry, 1-2 mm wide, and up to 8 cm long. It’s thick and dry; usually pale at first but soon darkens to a brown/black base that may have stiff hairs on it. There is a small collar that encircles the stem close to the cap.

**SPORE PRINT:** White or very pale yellow.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on sticks, logs, and other woody debris in hardwood forests, occasionally found growing near conifers. Usually found growing gregariously, in clusters, or alone from June to August.

**Comments:** *Marasmius rotula* is one of the most abundant mushrooms in the deciduous forests of Kansas. When dry, it can easily reconstitute with moisture, so they’re more easily found after rains.
Marasmius siccus – Orange Pinwheel

**Description:**
- **CAP:** 0.5-3 cm, bell-shaped, with a central depression. It is obviously pleated, bald, dry and orange when young. It fades to a pale orange with maturity.
- **GILLS:** Attached to the stem (or sometimes free from it), very distant and white to pale yellowish.
- **STEM:** Varies from 2.5-6.5 cm and is about 1 mm thick. It’s dry, wiry, shiny, and whitish/yellowish toward the cap but darkens to brown toward the base.
- **SPORE PRINT:** White.
- **GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Prefers leaf litter and woody debris and usually found in hardwood forests, growing gregariously, June to August.
- **Comments:** Of the 14 species of Marasmius found in Kansas, *M. siccus* is likely the most easily spotted due to its bright orange cap. Like *M. rotula* this species can also revive with moisture.
Morchella sp. – Morel

**Description:**

**CAP:** 2-11 cm tall and varies in shape, but usually egg-shaped; pitted and ridged. The ridges are bald and can erode with age, becoming dry and sharp; pale when young, darken slightly with age but remain yellowish to pale yellowish-brown. Attached to the stem with a prominent overhang/rim and hollow.

**STEM:** Can be from 2-12 cm in length and 1.5-8 cm wide; whitish or pale tan; bald or mealy with flaky granules. Hollow throughout.

**SPORE PRINT:** Creamy, yellowish or orangish.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal (some may be saprobic) and most often found under hardwoods, statewide, most often in April and May, but it’s been reported in March and June.

**Comments:** This description is general for all morel species found in the state. There are six known species of *Morchella* found in Kansas. Compare to *Gyromitra sp.* (pg. 37) (commonly called False Morels) so they are often confused with morels. *Gyromitra sp.* contain a toxin called monomethylhydrazine and should not be consumed. True morels are hollow throughout the fruiting bodies and stem and false morels are not.
Panaeolus foenisecii – Mower’s Mushroom, Haymaker, or Brown Hay Mushroom

Description:
CAP: 1-3 cm, bell-shaped but becomes nearly flat with age. It is bald and dark brown/cinnamon brown when young, but it drastically changes color with age and as it dries out. It’ll change to light brown, tan or buff with bands of these colors as it dries.
GILLS: Notched and attached to the stem or slightly pulling away from the stem. They’re brown and may darken in color with age, while having pale edges and close together or nearly distant.
STEM: 4-10 cm long and 1.5-3 mm thick, sometimes with an enlarged base. The stem is bald, fragile, hollow, and pale in color but it may darken with age.
SPORE PRINT: Dark brown to purple-brown, or nearly black.
GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic and frequently found growing on lawns. It can also be found growing in meadows or other grassy areas. Usually found growing alone or gregariously from May to July but can sometimes be found in the fall.
Comments: These are likely the most frequently encountered mushrooms in yards. The identification problem lies with the drastic color change as they dry out so people frequently find them in different stages and looking different, making identification difficult. This mushroom is considered poisonous.
Phallus hadriani –
Dune Stinkhorn or Stinkhorn

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:**
- **Immature** - Looks like a purple egg and can be up to 6 cm wide, usually buried but can have part of it exposed. When sliced open it will show a tiny, underdeveloped stinkhorn in a Jello-like substance usually olive-brown to dark brown.
- **Mature** - Tube-like reaching 25 cm high and 1.5-4 cm wide. The cap is covered with an olive-brown to dark brown slime that contains spores. It will often develop a hole at the tip with maturity. Sometimes donning a small, white to purple “hat” which is a remnant of the “egg.” The cap surface is covered with pits and ridges under the smelly slime.

**STEM:** Hollow and 1.5-3 cm thick, the base is surrounded by a purplish sac-like volva, a remnant of the “egg.”

**SPORE PRINT:** Dark brown to purple brown, or nearly black.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic in a variety of substrates including gardens, woodchips, lawns, and cultivated areas. It can be found growing alone or gregariously from May to November.

**Comments:** These mushrooms belong to a general group called Stinkhorns because they’re covered with a smelly slime substance that attracts insects that act as “pollinators.” They’ll land on the mushroom, inadvertently pick up spore-packed slime and transfer the spores to a different place. *Phallus impudicus* is identical but it lacks the purple egg/volva. Also compare it with *Phallus ravenelii* which has a smooth, rather than pitted cap surface.
Pleurotus ostreatus – Oyster Mushroom

**Description:**

**CAP:** 4-15 cm, convex, becoming flat or somewhat depressed. They are kidney-shaped or nearly circular. They’re somewhat greasy when they’re young; bald, white to gray-brown and smooth. They grow in shelf-like clusters.

**STEM/STALK:** Usually absent but when it’s there it is lateral or off-center. The gills run down the stem and are close together, whitish or with a gray tinge, sometimes can be yellow with age.

**SPORE PRINT:** White but can be grayish or even lilac.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic, found growing on dead logs and living trees. If found on living trees, it’s an indicator the tree is in poor health. Found throughout Kansas year-round, most often within the Kansas River watershed.

**Comments:** Edible, and a choice one at that. Compare with *Pleurotus dryinus*, which has a prominent stem and *Pleurotus pulmonarius*. This species will fruit in winter months during warm spells and offers a more palatable harvest compared with bug infested ones that fruit in spring and summer.
Pluteus cervinus – Deer Mushroom, Deer Shield, or Fawn Mushroom

**Description:**

**CAP:** 3-15 cm across, it starts out as convex but becomes flat with age. It may or may not have a slight bump in the center. It’s usually pale to dark brown, bald and glossy (it may be streaked with fibers), and tacky when wet.

**GILLS:** Free from the stem, start out white but become pink and finally a deep brownish pink; they’re crowded or close together.

**STEM:** 5-13 cm long, 0.5-2.5 cm thick, sometimes with an enlarged base. The stem is white but it may be streaked with brown fibers. It is also bald and dry.

**SPORE PRINT:** Pink to pinkish brown.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on deadwood, which happens regularly. Sometimes appears terrestrial when it’s actually on buried wood. It can be found growing alone, scattered or gregariously from April to November.

**Comments:** *Pluteus atricapillus* is another name for it. Recent evidence suggests there may be several separate species within this genus, but it’s difficult to tell from morphology alone and requires DNA analysis.
Neofavolus alveolaris – Hexagonal-Pored Polypore

Description:
CAP: 1-10 cm and vary in shape but it’s generally semicircular or kidney-shaped and bright orange in color. When young, it is scaly but becomes bald and less vibrant in color with age.
THE UNDERSIDE/PORE SURFACE: Runs down a lateral, stubby stem. The pore surface is usually white or yellowish-white, with hexagonal-shaped pores that are radially arranged.
STEM: Short and stubby, most often lateral but can be central. In the case of a central stem, the cap is round and sits on top of it like a plate on a pedestal.
SPORE PRINT: White.
GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic on decaying sticks and logs; sometimes it can be found on living hardwood trees. It grows gregariously from March to August. Sometimes fruiting bodies will dry out and stick around for a little while.
Comments: This polypore is one of the earliest to fruit in Kansas and is commonly encountered during morel season, but this species will remain long after morels are gone. It’s also known as Favolus alveolaris, Polyporus alveolaris and Polyporus mori.
Lentinus arcularis – Stalked Polypore

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-8 cm and shaped like a shallow vase. It’s dry, bald or finely scaly and brown to golden brown. The colors will break up into rough concentric zones and the edge of the cap can be finely hairy (easily seen using a hand lens).

**THE UNDERSIDE OF THE CAP/PORE SURFACE:** White and sometimes may run down the stem. The pore surface also has hexagonal-shaped pores. The stem is usually centered but may be off-center slightly and between 2-6 cm long and 1.5-4 cm wide.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on dead wood, preferring deciduous trees and can be found growing alone or in small groups. It will often appear terrestrial but deeper digging reveals it’s actually growing on buried wood. Found from March to July.

**Comments:** Polypores rarely fruit in the spring in Kansas except for *Lentinus arcularius* and *Polyporous alveolaris*. This species is frequently found by morel hunters and turkey hunters and is easily identified by the whitish angular pores, but its most distinctive feature is its delicate little fringe on the cap, also known as ciliate. Previously known as *Polyporous arcularius*. 

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Poronidulus conchifer – Little Nest Polypore

Description:
FRUITING BODY: At first cup-like and small, often confused for bird nest fungi but without the “eggs” inside. As it matures, it begins to extend outward and look more plate-like. When it’s young and still saucer-shaped to cup-shaped this fungus can vary in size, but gets up to 15 mm wide with zones of colors (white to brown) on the upper surface, and it’s bald. The cap can get up to 5 cm wide and is kidney-shaped but irregular, often exhibiting radial wrinkles. It’s whitish to brown/gray with zones of color. Sometimes, when two fruiting bodies are close together, they’ll fuse together.

PORE SURFACE/UNDERSIDE: White but may become slightly yellow with age and has a tiny stem. It has 2-4 circular/angular pores per mm with tubes that are 2 mm deep.

SPORE PRINT: White.

GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION: Saprobic on decaying hardwoods, but seems to prefer elm trees. It can be found throughout the year due to its supreme toughness, but it normally fruits from spring to fall. It can be found growing gregariously on branches, logs, and stumps.

Comments: Also known as Trametes conchifer. This fungus is probably one of the oddest polypores you can encounter in Kansas. In their young state, the cups contain microscopic, asexual spores splashed to distant sites by raindrops. In the mature state, where the extensions of the cup make it more polypore-like it can reproduce sexually. Thus, this adaptive little fungus essentially doubles its chances at successfully reproducing.
**Russula fragrantissima** – no common name

**Description:**

**CAP:** Varies between 7.5-20 cm and is convex when young but becomes more flat with age. Sometimes it will have a shallow depression. When it’s fresh it will be sticky and wet; dull yellow to yellowish or even brownish yellow. The skin of the cap will peel away easily from the margin.

**GILLS:** Attached to the stem, can be close together or nearly distant (may fork near the stem), and are whitish to creamy (may discolor to yellowish brown or brownish).

**STEM:** 7-15 cm long and can be 1.5-6 cm thick, white but discoloring to brownish to yellowish or sometimes even reddish near the base of the stem. It’s also dry, bald, and often becomes hollow with age.

**ODOR:** Strong and obvious, it’s been described as being similar to maraschino cherries or almonds. Heavy sniffing leads to a putrid scent.

**SPORE PRINT:** Creamy.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Mycorrhizal with hardwoods. Can be found growing alone, scattered or gregariously from June to September.

**Comments:** This species can easily be confused with *Russula mutabilis* and *Russula ventricosipes*. Both of these species have a similar odor to *R. fragrantissima*. *R. mutabilis* is orange in color and *R. ventricosipes* grows in sandy areas and has a more reddish stem. *R. fragrantissima* is most easily separated from other Russula species by its dull, yellow color, large size and sickly-sweet scent.
Sarcoscypha occidentalis – Stalked Scarlet Cup

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** Looks like a little cup or saucer and very small. Averaging about 2 cm across and rarely getting much bigger. The upper surface of the cup is scarlet red but fades with age and is bald. The underside is whitish but the red color of the surface often shows through.

**STEM:** 1-3 cm long, continues with the underside and is also whitish. The base for which you may have to dig has hairy, white mycelium filaments.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on decaying hardwood. Can be found growing alone, gregariously or in clusters from June to August. It frequently appears to be terrestrial but is actually on buried wood.

**Comments:** This species is abundant in the deciduous forests of Kansas and when you’re exploring, they may look like someone took a handful of brightly colored pieces of plastic and threw them on the ground. This species is frequently confused with *Sarcoscypha austriaca*, which fruits in the spring, lacks a stem, and has a much larger cup; they can be almost three times as big as *S. occidentalis*. 
Schizophyllum commune – Split-Gill

**Description:**

**CAP:** 1-5 cm wide, fan-shaped when attached to the side of a log, with their shape often being irregular. Finely-haired, dry and white to grayish. Lacks a stem. During dry spells, the edges will curl into the underside, most likely to conserve moisture.

**UNDERSIDE:** This species doesn’t have gills (per se) or a porous surface but rather gill-like folds that are distinctly split down the middle, a distinguishing characteristic.

**SPORE PRINT:** White.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on dead hardwoods, mostly found on fallen branches, can be parasitic on living species. Found throughout the year growing alone, gregariously, or clustered.

**Comments:** This species is one of the most widely distributed in the world, making it one of the most studied. They’re also capable of surviving year-round because of their ability to curl in on themselves and dry out, but will usually revive with moisture. This mushroom is also known for having 23,000 sexes (and counting). Most of what we know of mushroom genetics is due to *Schizophyllum commune*. 

© Lyndzee Rhine
**Stereum hirsutum** – False Turkey-Tail

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** 0.5-3 cm across but because they fuse together there’s no way to determine just how big a cluster of these can get. They’re fan-shaped, semicircular or irregular in shape and velvety on top. There are noticeable concentric zones of different textures and colors. The colors generally range from yellow to tan/brown, reddish and may develop a greenish hue as they play host to algae. There is no obvious stem as they are laterally attached to the wood.

**UNDERSIDE:** Smooth, yellow to yellow-brown or even grayish. Sometimes it will bruise a darker yellow, but it can be difficult to detect.

**SPORE PRINT:** White, but difficult to gather.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on dead hardwoods, it seems to favor oak trees. Can be found growing densely gregariously, all year-round.

**Comments:** This is a crust fungus easily confused with Stereum ostrea (which is not as fused together, see pg. 57) and Trametes versicolor (which has a noticeable porous surface on the underside, see pg. 58).
**Stereum ostrea** – False Turkey-Tail

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** 1-7 cm across and is shaped like a funnel cut down the middle, can also be very fan-shaped or semicircular or shaped like an odd kidney. The top is densely velvety or hairy but gets smoother with maturity. It has concentric zones of colors ranging from red, orange, yellow, brown and buff. Like *Stereum hirsutum*, it may take on a greenish hue due to hosting algae.

**UNDERSIDE:** Smooth, lacks a porous surface, and is whitish to grayish but can also be a pale reddish-brown color.

**SPORE PRINT:** White but difficult to obtain.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on dead hardwoods. Found growing densely gregariously. Although they can be found year-round, they fruit in the summer and fall, but the fruiting bodies will persist through winter and spring.

**Comments:** Compare carefully with *Stereum hirsutum* and *Trametes versicolor* (Turkey-Tail, pg. 58). The defining characteristics of *S. ostrea* include the velvety or hairy top and the smooth nonporous underside. Because it lacks a porous surface on the underside, it is considered a crust fungus, unlike *T. versicolor*, which is a polypore.
*Trametes versicolor* – Turkey-Tail

**Description:**

**CAP:** Up to 10 cm across and 1-3 mm thick. They’re flexible when fresh but get stiffer with age. Can be circular, semicircular, or kidney-shaped and often overlap. They are frequently fused with one another. They’re densely velvety or hairy and have alternating zones of texture. Those zones coincide with the concentric zones of colors that can be white, brown, reddish-brown, yellow and sometimes blue, green and orange.

**UNDERSIDE/PORE SURFACE:** Visible pores (but can be very small, 4+ pores per mm, so use a hand lens); it’s also whitish to pale gray in color.

**SPORE PRINT:** White, but difficult to obtain.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on dead hardwood, rarely found on conifers. Found growing in clusters or rosettes, year-round. Similar to *Stereum ostrea*, it actually fruits in the spring, summer and fall, but will remain all year.

**Comments:** The colorful zones and fan-shaped cap are what give this species its common name, as it resembles a turkey’s tail. Like snowflakes, no two caps are the same. The tiny pores, fuzzy caps and flexible bodies distinguish this species from *Stereum ostrea* and *S. hirsutum*. 
**Xylaria polymorpha** – Dead Man’s Fingers

**Description:**

**FRUITING BODY:** The fruiting body is 3-10 cm tall and up to 2.5 cm thick. Very tough and shaped like a club or even a finger with a rounded tip. When young (spring) it is blueish to purplish with a white tip but as it matures it turns black. It can have small bumps or wrinkles on the surface.

**GROWTH AND DISTRIBUTION:** Saprobic on decaying stumps and logs, sometimes appearing terrestrial when it’s actually attached to buried wood. It can be found growing alone but most commonly found growing in clusters, appearing in the spring and then decays in late summer and fall. Old fruiting bodies will persist through the winter so it can be found year-round.

**Comments:** The blackened fruiting body has been said to resemble hands coming out of the substrate, almost like fingers scratching their way out of a grave, giving this species its common name - “Dead Man’s Fingers.” Compare with *Xylaria longipes.*
Mushroom Poisoning

Most reports of “mushroom poisonings” are the result of allergic reactions, overindulgence and consumption of rotten specimens. All three generally share the same symptoms: nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and/or diarrhea. If you eat a new species of mushroom, it’s good practice to consume it in small quantities to gauge your body’s reaction and see if you have an allergic reaction. Keep one, whole mushroom uncooked, for identification purposes in case you do have an adverse reaction. Overindulgence and eating rotten mushrooms can easily be avoided by, well, not eating too many in one sitting and examining the ones you choose to eat. There is a 4th type of mushroom poisoning that is psychological and fear-driven. People who have lingering doubts about the mushrooms they’re considering eating will be more apt to experience discomfort whether there’s a physical reaction or not. It is imperative to double-check species identification and seek a second opinion or professional help if you have any doubts. Relatively few species cause fatal poisonings but those that do are common. Keep in mind species known to cause mild symptoms may be fatal to those who are immunocompromised. It’s important to learn the different kinds of mushroom poisonings and poisonous species in your area. With any kind of poisoning, you should seek immediate medical attention and identify the culprit.

“There are many different types of mycotoxins. Of 14 distinct types of mushroom poisoning found worldwide, so far about 10 distinctive patterns of reactions to mycotoxins have been observed in North America. However, since most mushrooms species are rarely eaten, many toxins are poorly documented, and syndromes not yet observed in North America may turn up as more and more people experiment with eating wild mushrooms.”

— North American Mycological Association
What is a mushroom?
Simply put, mushrooms are the fruiting body, or reproductive structure, of a fungus. Like an apple to a tree, a mushroom is not the entire organism, but part of it. Not all fungi qualify as a mushroom, so mushroom refers to a fungus that produces fleshy, fruiting bodies. For example, yeast, bread molds, and ringworm are all fungi but none of them are mushrooms because they don’t produce fleshy, fruiting bodies.

How do I tell if a mushroom is safe to eat?
There’s no singular way that tells us if a mushroom is poisonous or not. Myths such as touching the mushroom with a silver spoon are, without exception, absolute nonsense. Mushrooms partially eaten by other animals (snails, opossums, etc.) are not necessarily safe for human consumption. Finally, just because it smells and tastes good doesn’t mean it’s edible. It takes commitment and a good deal of effort to identify mushrooms correctly. Always live by the cardinal rule: WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.

If you suspect you have consumed a poisonous mushroom or begin to feel ill after consuming one, contact a physician or your local poison control center immediately.

Kansas Poison Control Centers:
Wichita – (316) 263-9999
Kansas City, KS – (785) 295-8095
Topeka – (785) 354-6106
The University of Kansas Health System – 1-800-222-1222

For more information about mushroom poisonings and symptoms please visit:
namyco.org/mushroom_poisoning_syndromes.php.

Frequently Asked Questions

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When and where do mushrooms grow?
The peak months for mushrooms are usually the wettest and warmer months. In Kansas, the height of mushroom fruiting occurs from September through December and March through May. Keep in mind temperature and moisture are major contributing factors, and no two mushroom seasons are alike, and some years are considerably better than others. The more you get out and look for mushrooms, the more likely you’ll begin to understand the irregularity of mushroom fruitings and develop an intuition for when and where they grow. On the other hand, a lot of mushroom hunting comes down to timing. If you’re too early, you won’t see them as they’re under debris. If you’re too late, you’ll find they’ve already been discovered by other critters, too old, or already picked by a fellow enthusiast. All this means is no matter how experienced you are, you can increase your chances of success if you continue to search the same places you’ve found them in the past and possibly be rewarded with the discovery of species unknown to you.

What is the difference between a mushroom and a toadstool?
The term “toadstool,” typically has negative connotations and tends to instill a sense of fear or suggest the organism is poisonous. Since most people already believe most mushrooms are poisonous, the two terms are virtually interchangeable. “Toadstool” may derive from the old belief that toads gave people warts and made mushrooms poisonous by sitting on them.

Does it harm the mushroom by picking it?
Mushrooms are the fruiting body (reproductive part) of the larger, fungal organism. Picking a mushroom is like picking an apple from a tree. No harm is done so long as you collect them gently and avoid causing damage to the environment you found it in. Usually, by the time you’ve found the mushroom it’s already released a significant number of spores and will continue to do so even after being
picked. So, good news! Mushrooms are a renewable resource and the only way to eradicate them is to eliminate their habitat entirely.

**Can you get sick from touching a mushroom?**

No, you cannot get sick from touching a mushroom. Mushrooms can only cause harm when ingested. There are, however, other potentially dangerous things to be aware of. Ticks, venomous snakes, and poison ivy to name a few. Do research on the area you plan to explore and arm yourself with knowledge of potential inherent dangers.

**How do I get rid of the mushrooms in my yard?**

The only way to eliminate the mushrooms growing in your yard is to get rid of your yard. Only slightly joking. Mushrooms in your yard are a sign of a well-established mycelium, or the body of the fungus. That species has probably formed symbiotic relationships with the trees in your yard or are decomposing old wood and adding nutrients back into the soil. The point is, everything is interconnected and to completely get rid of the mushrooms you’ll have to remove that on which it feeds or has a relationship with. The whole picture essentially comes down to removing your yard and starting over, but even starting over gives ample opportunities for fungi to move in. If you’re concerned about pets or young children accidently ingesting the mushrooms, the easiest thing to do is train your dog and teach children to not eat mushrooms found in the yard.

**What kind of equipment do I need?**

Foraging and foraying don’t require any fancy gear. It’s advised you bring along a rigid container such as a basket, cardboard box, mesh sack or bucket. Don’t use plastic bags as mushrooms have to “breathe,” and using them traps moisture making the mushrooms “sweat” and decay more rapidly. Bring along a knife and/or trowel to aid with digging up mushrooms (important for identification) or removing them from trees. A pencil and notebook are useful
for taking field notes and collecting spore prints. Water and snacks are a must if you plan to go wandering around for long periods of time. Sunscreen and bug spray (or even items like Permethrin that’s applied to clothes prior to wearing) to avoid obvious hazards. Always check yourself and children for ticks after venturing into the woods and remove them immediately. Pack binoculars if you’re interested in bird or mammal watching or see a mushroom that’s a little too far off in the distance. Other optional equipment: a hand lens, compass, walking stick, a field guide, small jars or vials for tiny species, and a camera.

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**Glossary**

**Bruising** - Happens when damage is done to the mushroom (i.e., cutting, poking, tearing, etc.), may result in color change which may be helpful with identification.

**Button stage** - Small, underdeveloped mushrooms that usually look like little balls.

**Deliquece** - Dissolve or melt away.

**Fairy ring** - Circle of mushrooms fruiting from mycelium. You can see the ring even without the mushrooms by the grass in the middle of the ring taking on a darker color.

**False gills** - Fold-like structures that can look like gills but differ by not being structurally distinct. True gills are distinct, separate, blade-like structures; false gills look more like excessively wrinkled skin.

**Fruiting body** - The spore-producing reproductive organ of a fungus, often referred to as a mushroom.

**Gregariously** - Growing in open clusters or colonies.

**Hyphae** - A branching filament that makes up the mycelium of a fungus.

**Latex** - A milk-like or juice substance exuded by *Lactarius sp.*, but a few others may do it as well.

**Mycelium** - The vegetative part of a fungus; a large network of hyphae all connected. This is the part of the fungus not normally seen but does all of the work (i.e., absorption of nutrients, anchoring, etc.).

**Mycorrhizal** - A mutualistic, symbiotic relationship between fungal hyphae and the roots of plants/trees. The tree provides sugars and other nutrients to the fungus while the fungus helps the tree absorb more water and nutrients.

**Parasitic** - Living on another living organism (plant, tree, insect, etc.) and pulling nutrients at the host’s expense.

**Partial veil** - A temporary tissue that covers the immature gills.

**Pathogenic** - Causing disease.

**Periodioles** - Egg-like structures that house spores; associated with bird's nest fungi.
**Saprobic** - Using dead or decaying organic material as food and aiding in decomposition.

**Scat** - Animal excrement, dung, poop.

**Spore print** - Powdery deposit left by mushroom. Can be obtained by setting mushroom cap/fruiting body on glass, paper, or other material, covering it and letting it sit for a period of time. Can be useful for identification.

**Troop** - Mushrooms that are close together but not close enough to be called a cluster.

### References

This booklet focuses on how to identify specific species of mushrooms, providing only brief descriptions of each species. There are many excellent field guides offering detailed descriptions available at local book dealers, libraries, and online. It is highly recommended multiple sources be used and compared for accurate identification. The following list consists of reference books that may aid in identification, expand your fungal knowledge, and inspire you. Keep in mind older references may have species listed under old names.


The following websites are excellent resources:

- Fungiforthepeople.org
- Mushroomexpert.com
- Mushroomobserver.org
- Mykobank.org
- Namyco.org

*Please consult your field guides for specific species characteristics. It’s important to go from the field guide or key you’re using versus going from the mushroom and making it “fit” into a field guide description. The “want” for a species to be what you hope it is, is much stronger than what it actually is. Be astute, detailed and absolute, with your observations and identification.*
Pocket Guides
Single copies of GPNC Pocket Guides may be picked up free at the Great Plains Nature Center. All GPNC Pocket Guides may also be downloaded in pdf format from GPNC.org. Copies can be mailed for $3 each by sending your check, payable to FGPNC, to: Pocket Guides, Great Plains Nature Center, 6232 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67220.

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Great Plains Nature Center

The Great Plains Nature Center is a cooperative project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, City of Wichita Department of Park and Recreation and the Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center. The GPNC features the Koch Habitat Hall, Owl's Nest gift shop, Coleman Auditorium, and 2 miles of Chisholm Creek Park nature trails. The Friends of the Great Plains Nature Center was formed to increase awareness of and help sustain the center's environmental education mission. For more information visit the Great Plains Nature Center website at www.gpnc.org. Please visit or contact us at the Great Plains Nature Center, 6232 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67220 or phone us at 316-683-5499.

Chickadee Checkoff

The Chickadee Checkoff is a voluntary donation program for nongame projects sponsored by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Kansas taxpayers are able to contribute on their individual state income tax form. Donations can also be made by sending a check to Chickadee Checkoff Program, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Since 1980, the Chickadee Checkoff program has distributed over $4 million to projects that help endangered species, supports wildlife education projects at schools and nature centers, and supports hundreds of other nongame conservation projects.

Evergy Green Team

Evergy Inc., formerly Westar Energy and KCP&L, serves approximately 1.6 million customers in Kansas and Missouri. The Evergy Green Team is an employee-led group of volunteers that takes on projects benefiting the environment. Since 1989, the Green Team has been improving wildlife habitat through wetland creation and restoration and native grass and tree planting. They build bridges and trails and work to protect and reintroduce sensitive plant and animal species. The Green Team can be reached at 785-575-6355 or at Jason.Schwartz@evergy.com.

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