

Fungi Introduction

by Tony Harding

We often come across fungi whilst out in the woods and countryside but most of us know very little about these unusual growths, so let me enlighten you!

Fungi are not plants, and neither are they animals. Unlike plants, which convert the sun's energy into food, fungi have no chlorophyll to convert the sun's energy into food, instead they feed on other plant and animal material and do not need sunlight; they use enzymes to dissolve their food before they absorb it.

The toadstools and mushrooms (there is no clear distinction between these two terms) we see, which may indeed rot away after a few days, are just the fruiting bodies connected to long-lived underground fungal threads, called hyphae. The hyphae combine to form a mycelium, sometimes in the form of an expanding disc or 'fairy ring'.

Autumn is the main time to find fruit bodies, although a few species can be found all year round. Ancient woodland such as Bluebell Wood, part of Linslade Wood is a good local place to see fungi, usually during September to November, particularly after overnight rain. Old rotting tree stumps and logs are a common place to see fungi, often alongside pathways where the spores are carried by the wind.

As there are about 4000 larger fungus species found in the British Isles, identifying them can be quite difficult; particularly important if you ever consider taking them home to eat as some are deadly poisonous. However someone once said that; all mushrooms are edible – **some only once!**

Many of the mushrooms reappear each year often in the same approximate place and during the same time of the month, depending very much on the weather, moisture and temperature. Autumn 2011 was a disappointing year for fungi due to the unseasonably mild and dry weather however several species were identified in Bluebell Wood, as detailed below complete with the location (grid reference square) for use with the map below. Images of these sighting can be seen on the Photograph page.