

DO YOU KNOW THE DIFFERENCE? Mushroom look-alikes ... Neil Tucker



Agaricus augustus

Everyone is familiar with the cultivated mushroom, available widely in supermarkets and greengrocers. It is *Agaricus bisporus*. If you go collecting mushrooms in fields you could be collecting a related species, *Agaricus campestris*, the Field Mushroom or *Agaricus arvensis*, known as the Horse Mushroom. There is little to distinguish between the three, except that the last can grow much larger, and can have a chemical smell. They all



Agaricus arvensis

have white caps and pink to brown gills and all are edible.

Two other *Agaricus* species grow locally – *A. augustus*, the Prince mushroom and “pink stainer” (no scientific name yet). The first of these has a whitish cap with brown scales or fibrils and is edible. The second has a white cap with pinkish blotches. It is probably edible, but little is known about it.



Agaricus xanthodermus

Looking similar to the first three is *A. xanthodermus*, the Yellow-stainer. It usually looks squarish in profile and if you scratch or rub the cap or stipe (stem) it will stain yellow. Regarded as poisonous, its toxicity varies among people, and perhaps among different locations.



Agaricus “pink stainer”

Then there are the *Amanitas*. From the top they look just like ordinary mushrooms but have white gills. For example, there is *Amanita ochrophylla*, with granules scattered over the cap (there were a lot in Kuarka Dorla this year) and *A. farinacea*, which sprinkles ‘flour’ around it on the ground. There are others too, and all of them should be avoided, as they are closely related to the Fly agaric, *A. muscaria* (the red one with white granules).



Amanita farinacea

And how would you like to mistakenly eat a Ghoul fungus that grows on and near animal carcasses? *Hebeloma aminophilum* is a lover of amino acids, i.e. proteins. It is easily confused with real mushrooms, having similar-coloured cap and gills. There is also the *Cortinarius* species. Many are brightly-coloured – yellow, purple, blue – but there are white species too, again with brown gills.

There are other look-alike species in all these genera, and there are other genera with white-capped, brown-gilled species. Little is known of the edibility of Australian fungi, so please buy yours at the shop, and leave these in the ground for you and others to enjoy. All fungi are protected in National Parks.



Amanita ochrophylla



Hebeloma aminophilum



Cortinarius austroalbidus

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