

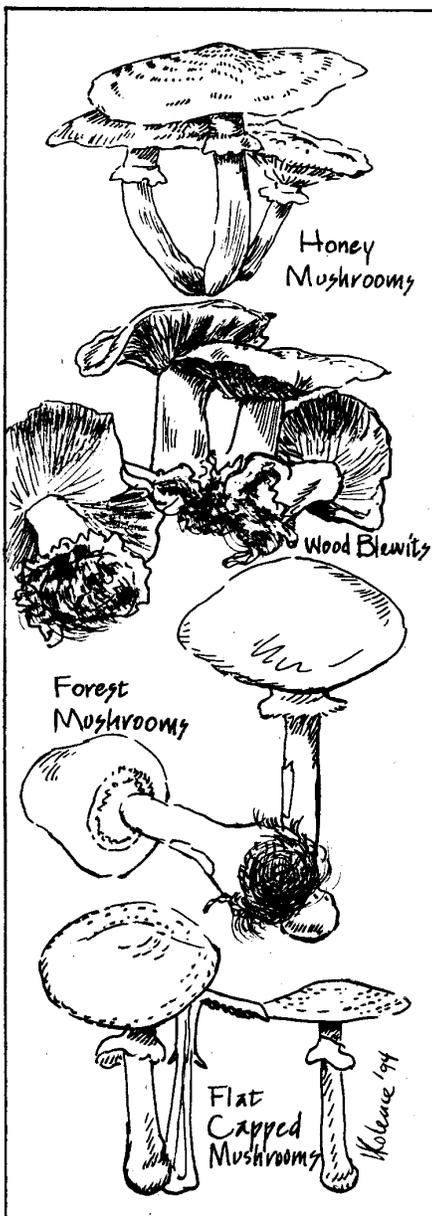


Foothills

Nature Notes

CITY OF PALO ALTO • COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT • OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND GOLF DIVISION

Mushrooms: Woodland Jewels



Each year, thousands of people venture into fields and woods in search of “nature’s jewels” – mushrooms. Within our foothills preserves, from November through January, mushrooms and other fungi are found along roads, trails, and in picnic areas. The term mushroom is generally applied to those fungi that possess a stem with a cap on top. Other fungi assume various shapes, including those of cups, balls, candles, and even brains. While mushroom collecting within the confines of the preserves is prohibited, a word of caution is in order for those who may be interested in collecting elsewhere. There are several mushrooms that can cause violent illness and death. Only persons with considerable experience in collecting fungi should attempt to pick mushrooms in the wild.

The **Honey Mushroom** (*Armillaria mellea*) is often found growing at the base of buckeye trees. It grows singly or in clusters of 30 to 100 mushrooms. The yellowish-brown, scaly caps are about six inches across. The edges of mature caps are wavy. The eight-inch stem possesses an annulus or ring close to the gills and tapers toward the base. This mushroom is a source of economic damage to orchards which it commonly infests.

Colorful **Wood Blewits** (*Lepista nuda*) is found on the ground in fairy rings. The six-inch caps vary in color from brownish-pink to lavender, and in form, from convex to expanded. The four-inch stems are velvety lavender, with bulbous bases. One fairy ring in Foothills Park measured 10 feet across and contained more than 50 mushrooms.

Banded Psathyrella (*Psathyrella conopilea*) can be found by the hundreds. The one-inch caps change color from dark tan when moist, to a light tan when dry. Many caps are banded toward the margins. These slender stems are hollow and thus very fragile. On foggy mornings, these delicate mushrooms poking up through the soil bring to mind the leprechaun of Irish folklore.

The **Forest Mushroom** (*Agaricus silvicola*) is found on the ground in small clusters. The four-inch cap is white with some pink or tan. The stout stems grow to a length of six inches and possess annuli and bulbous bases.

The **Flat-Capped Mushroom** (*Agaricus placomyces*) may be distinguished by the character of the cap. The caps of these mushrooms are covered with dark-brown, matted fibrils. The annulus of this species disappears with age.

Angel Buttons (*Hygrophorous eburneus*) are found in wooded sections of the preserves, where live oaks and madrone dominate. Normally, these all-white mushrooms are found barely poking up through the leaves. The two-inch caps are glossy when dry, and sticky when moist. The convex to expanded caps can be covered with dirt and leaf matter. The gills are often inhabited by hundreds of minute jumping insects, which seek shelter from the rains. The stems grow to about three inches. These mushrooms are found growing in small clusters, numbering from two to six.

The **Inky Cap** (*Coprinus atramentarius*) is the most common species of this genus in the preserves. While the individual mushroom lasts only a few days, the species may be found from December to March. The two or three-inch caps are yellowish-brown at top center, while the margins are light gray and striated. Through auto-digestion the gills turn into a black, liquid mass. With age, the edges of the caps turn up and inward. The hollow, white stems grow to about three inches in height.

The **Orange Chantrelle** (*Cantharellus cibarius*) is found growing beneath buckeye trees. The smooth, three-inch caps have wavy, inrolled margins. The color of these caps is usually an egg-yolk orange. The shallow, pale orange gills extend part of the way down the three-inch stems. The odor of these mushrooms is close to that of carrots.

The **Red-Cracked Bolete** (*Boletus chrysenteron*) is found growing beneath bay laurel. The four-inch brown caps are slightly sticky in texture and convex in form. With age, these caps crack open, exposing the yellow inner flesh and the red cuticle. If you look closely, you will see a thin red layer. The reproductive spores of the bolete and all other boletes are produced in tubes instead of gills. The tubes of this bolete are bright yellow with occasional green spots, which result from bruising. The three-inch stems are red and yellow.

Witches Butter (*Tremella lutescens*) is not a mushroom but a jelly fungus. It is found in the wooded sections of the preserves attached to oak branches. Witches Butter is bright yellow-orange, soft, slimy, and convoluted like a brain. These blobs of jelly grow to a length of six inches. A closely related arid similar jelly fungus also occurs in the preserves, but is less abundant and may be differentiated by its white color.

Candle Snuff Fungus (*Xylaria hypoxylon*) differs from the common mushroom in form and occurs on bay laurel trees in shaded canyons. To find this fungi, you must examine several downed branches. If you are lucky, you will find a branch that is covered with several one-inch, candle-like projections covered by a powdery white bloom, which is believed to be spores. The lower sections of the fungi are normally black.

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