

# Learning in the Leaves

## Identification- Fly Agaric and Amanita Muscaria



### Distinguishing Features

- The cap of Amanita muscaria ranges from 10 to 20cm diameter at maturity; red or occasionally orange (and very rarely a white form is seen: it does not have red spots, although some picture-book Fly Agarics are depicted in this way!). Caps usually flatten or even become slightly concave when fully developed, but occasionally the Fly Agaric remains broadly convex.
- Caps of the Fly Agaric usually retain irregular, white fragments of the universal veil, but in wet weather they can wash off even while the caps are young and domed - as seen on the left. In all but the driest of weather, Amanita muscaria caps flatten at maturity.
- When damaged, the flesh just below the pellicle (the skin of the cap) of a Fly Agaric is initially white but soon turns yellow on exposure to air.
- Amanita muscaria has white, free, crowded gills that turn pale yellow as the fruitbody matures.
- Fly Agaric stems are 10 to 25cm long and 1.5 to 2cm in diameter; white and ragged with a grooved, hanging white ring.
- The swollen stem base retains the white remains of the sack-like volva, which eventually fragments into rings of scales around the base of mature specimens.

### Interesting Facts

- Father Christmas, or Santa Claus, has a red-and-white coat that may also be a reference to the Fly Agaric. Reindeers are known to eat Amanita muscaria mushrooms - and indeed, how else is a reindeer going to be able to fly? There are reports of Siberian people, seeing the drunken behaviour of a reindeer that had eaten Fly Agarics, slaughtering the beast in order to get the same mind-bending effects from eating its meat.
- It's surely worth pointing out again that, although deaths from Amanita muscaria poisoning are probably rare occurrences, this hallucinogenic fungus contains toxins not all of which are destroyed by cooking. The two main toxic alkaloids contained in Fly Agarics are muscimol and ibotenic acid. These chemicals are mainly concentrated in the caps of the mushrooms; concentration varies greatly with age and from specimen to specimen.
- [information collated from the First Nature Website: [www.first-nature.com](http://www.first-nature.com) ]