

Learning in the Leaves

Identification- *Agaricus arvensis* Schaeff. - Horse Mushroom



Distinguishing Features

- The cap of *Agaricus arvensis* matures at 8 to 20cm (exceptionally to more than 30cm) diameter. White but yellowing gradually with age, smooth or finely scaly, the cap is initially spherical and expands until it is flat or nearly so. The thick flesh is white and firm. The cap turns yellowish where bruised, and old caps often take on a yellow-brown tinge.
- At first pale pink, darkening and then becoming brown, the gills of the Horse Mushroom are free and crowded.
- Up to 10cm tall, the parallel stem usually a small bulb at its base and a robust, double ring with a cog-wheel form on the underside.
- The solid stem is smooth above the ring but sometimes finely scaly below. Its diameter ranges from 2 to 3cm.
- When cut at the stem base, *Agaricus arvensis* does not rapidly turn bright yellow - a useful visual distinction between this edible mushroom and the poisonous Yellow Stainer, *Agaricus xanthodermus*, whose stem base turns chrome yellow as soon as its cut flesh is exposed to air.

Interesting Facts

- The specific epithet *arvensis* means 'of the field' or 'of meadows' - a reference to the habitat in which the Horse Mushroom is most commonly found. Less obviously, the common name may not be the more obvious to horses and its apparent appetite for horse manure (and hence the common occurrence of this mushroom near stables or fields in which horses graze) but, some people have suggested, an allusion to the large size that these mushrooms can attain.
- In New Zealand this species is commonly known as the Snowball Mushroom.
- [information collated from the First Nature Website: www.first-nature.com]