

# MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

28 August 2012

I can't get over the fact that we've had – on human terms – our fourth failed summer. There are some reasons for joy, however, because mushrooms don't have the same reactions.

Now my great friend Justin has a theory that August is the height of the Boletus year. It is true that we hit the big time in h summer in 2010 and 2011, but prior to that I never expected to find anything until late September. There isn't very much out there at the moment, but just to get you excited, there are plenty of early-season species beginning to emerge:



Can anyone work out why the stinkhorn's scientific name is *Phallus impudicus*?

OK, the stinkhorn makes lots of people snortle (can't think why) but it is edible in its very young stage. In case you're interested in learning more, here is the excerpt on the species from 'A Mushroom Is A Misunderstood Rose':

On a more familiar and prosaic level the stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*) is a common mushroom across temperate parts

of the Northern Hemisphere. This begins its fruiting stage as an 'egg' with a jelly-like layer immediately below the white 'shell'. The mushroom lives up to both parts of its name when the egg 'hatches' and the 'horn' emerges. The structure conforms to the first bit of the scientific name and the second part of its common name by bearing a striking resemblance to an erect penis ('horn' means hard-on in Anglo Saxon).

As a result, it is no surprise that mediaeval doctors used the mushroom to treat erectile problems, albeit in its early edible egg-like state. At this point it is odour-free: I doubt many people would be prepared to eat the mature version.

Meanwhile on the forest floor, flies land on the smell – green, brown or black tip, believing it to be some choice morsel of rotting flesh. Their feet immediately pick up spores from the slimy surface and when they leave the mushroom – presumably in disgust at having wasted their time – they inadvertently take thousands of hitch-hiking spores. As the insects disperse to find genuine pieces of rotting organic matter, on landing they shed hundreds or thousands of spores in what is potentially the perfect habitat for a new mycelium.

On a gastronomic level, I am far more excited by my finds of wood hedgehogs (*Hydnum repandum*). The taste is comparable to chanterelles, but to my mind the slightly crunchy texture makes them superior. They are very difficult to photograph well, but the following were all taken on 27 August 2012 and here goes . . .





The appearance varies wildly – the critical thing is the 'spines' instead of gills . . .

Otherwise, my forays are now filling up. I have limited availability left on

23, 29, 30 September

6, 13, 14 October

See the website for details, but if you plan on coming, don't leave it too late!

Happy hunting!

Daniel Butler

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P.S. As always, let me know if you want to be removed from the list and I will do it forthwith.