

Ubiquitous and ephemeral, fungi have long fascinated both researchers and casual observers alike. Their range of form, size and colour is phenomenal. So too, their ability to appear overnight, as if from nowhere, and transform a dull field or forest floor with their colourful diversity.

What the casual observers see when they pick up a toadstool or mushroom is merely the fruitbody, the part that produces and releases the spores. The true body or *mycelium* of the fungus lies hidden within the soil or wood in which it is growing. Pull a rotting log to pieces and you will see lots of mycelium, the thin white threads that are slowly reducing the log to dust.

Of course, fungi have other fascinating properties too. Some are very toxic and just one or two spoonfuls can be deadly. On the other hand, some are edible, ranking among the most highly regarded of culinary delights. One final point of interest; many of our New Zealand fungi have not yet been well researched — there's doubtless many more new species yet to be discovered!

*Crinipellis procera*. In twigs on forest floor, Silverstream, Lower Hutt. Common in forest litter and easily identified by the thin black stems, up to 15 cm long. Photo: Rob Lucas

Late afternoon sun gives a pleasing effect to this image of a *Xeromphalina tenuipes*.

Photo: Syd Moore

*Aseroa rubra* (the stinkhorn flower). Flies feed on the spore-bearing brown gleba, attracted by its stench. Measures about 6 cm across from tentacle to tentacle. Photo: Syd Moore



*Nidula candida*. On fallen twigs, Whirinaki forest. The spores of the birds nest fungus are held in pellets within the nest and splashed out by rain drops. Several types of birds nest fungi can be found throughout New Zealand. Photo: Rob Lucas

