

'Fungus icicles', *Hericium clathroides*.
Photo: J. Bedford.



appearance, especially when on a dead standing trunk, has led to a number of amusing popular names – in Stewart Island, for example, they are known as 'moa droppings' (although you have to believe that the droppings are carried aloft as the tree grows!), and in Japan as 'monkey seats'. The upper side of *Ganoderma* fruit-bodies is usually covered with a brown powder, a deposit of thousands, if not millions, of spores. The lower, pore surface, from which the spores are produced, is either white or dark brown, depending on the stage of

growth. When the pore surface is white, it can be scratched easily to show the brown tissue beneath. Artists (graffiti and otherwise) can exploit this, and hence *Ganoderma* is also known as the 'artist's conk'. Each year, the long-lived, woody-hard fruit-bodies develop a growth ring, similar to the annual rings of trees, and in time the fungus can grow to a large size.

Many species of mushrooms are also saprophytes. Mushrooms are familiar to most people as a delicious vegetable bought at the supermarket, or as the object of expeditions

across farmland on crisp autumn mornings. But the word 'mushroom' in a botanical sense refers to all fungi that have fruit-bodies with gills on the underside of a cap, including all those species popularly called 'toadstools'. A mushroom's spores are produced on the gills, and are spread by the wind. Many types of mushrooms are edible, but there is no simple rule to distinguish edible from poisonous types. Accurate identification of any mushroom is the first and most important step before thinking about eating it. For many species of mushroom in New Zealand, however,