

FUNGI IN SCHOOLS

for
CHILDREN
TEACHERS
PARENTS

and other
interested parties



STINKHORNS

If you are walking through the woods in autumn and smell something like bad meat you are probably near a Stinkhorn fungus, *Phallus impudicus*. Try and sniff it out and you will probably see a white spongy stalk about 10 cm high ending in a conical cap which may be green and sticky or, if the Stinkhorn is old, it will look like a white honeycomb (Figs. C & D). At the base of the stalk, buried in the leaf litter, you can find the remains of the egg from which the cap and stalk emerged. There are often other undeveloped eggs nearby and if you lift one up carefully there will be a thick white cord coming from the base which branches many times as it disappears into the leaf litter surrounding the egg. Cut the egg in half from top to bottom (or look at Fig. B) and inside are the cap and stem very squashed up. If you keep an egg on damp moss in a jar you can watch the stalk expand; it happens quite quickly, perhaps in 2-3 hours. Be careful to choose an egg that is just ready to develop with the skin broken at the top. Keep the jar covered as the smell from the green mucus is very dreadful. The mucus contains large numbers of spores and the bad smell attracts many flies (another reason for keeping the jar covered) which quickly remove the spores + mucus and also the smell.

This is the **Common Stinkhorn** but you may also find a smaller pink one, the **Dog Stinkhorn**, *Mutinus caninus* (Fig. F) and then, just for fun, Fig. E shows a picture of a very rare one, *Clathrus archeri* which you will almost certainly not find unless you live in Cornwall, Kent, Surrey or Sussex. You can read about it in *The Mycologist 2*: January 1988.

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Next time: Spores and Splashes



Fig. A-D. Common Stinkhorn (*Phallus impudicus*). A. egg; B, egg cut in half; C, fruitbody with green sticky cap; D, fruitbody showing honey-comb cap as flies remove the green mucus; Fig. E. *Clathrus archeri*; Fig. F. Dog Stinkhorn (*Mutinus caninus*). BMS Slide collection.