



## FIRST STEPS

### FUNGI IN GARDENS

A few fungi are to be found in even a very small garden. These will mostly be common species, but be prepared for anything. My former garden produced the only British collection of a subterranean puffball, *Gasterosporium simplex*. It is well worth while becoming really familiar with your garden species so that they, and their relatives, can be recognized when you see them in other places. Nearly all gardens have a lawn and at some time or other there is sure to be a fairy-ring. Usually the ring is caused by the 'Fairy-ring Champignon' (*Marasmius oreades*), but many other fungi form rings in grass. You may be fortunate, as I once was, to have a ring of the 'St George's Mushroom' (*Calocybe gambosa*), an edible fungus that appears in the last week of April. *Clitocybe rivulosa*, a small, whitish toadstool which is poisonous, commonly forms small rings on lawns near where I live. Wax-caps or *Hygrocybe* species occur on long-established lawns especially in late autumn after grass cutting has finished. They range in colour from yellow to orange and red, such as the 'Scarlet Hood', *H. coccinea* (Fig. A); the 'Parrot Wax-cap', *H. psittacina*, is green and yellow and very slimy. Several small *Mycena* species appear in troops; these include *M. aetites*, grey with a nitrous smell, and the white and yellow *M. flavoalba*. If the lawn is mossy there will surely be fruitbodies of a tiny toadstool with decurrent gills, called *Rickenella fibula*.

All the species mentioned so far have white spores. Two species of *Nolanea* frequently found have dark-coloured caps and pink spores. The 'Silky *Nolanea*', *N. sericea* (Fig. B) has a strong mealy smell whereas *N. staurospora* has little smell; they are readily distinguished on their spore shapes. A little brown toadstool, the 'Brown Hay Cap', *Panaeolina foenicisecii* (Fig. C) is one of the commonest species in short grass from spring to autumn. My favourite is the 'Little Jap Umbrella', *Coprinus plicatilis* (Fig. D) which has black spores. The Field Mushroom (*A. campestris*) is sometimes found in gardens, but beware of the 'Yellow-staining Mushroom' (*A. xanthodermus*), which may occur too and can cause great discomfort when eaten.

Puffballs also occur. *Vascellum pratense*, which is white, and *Lycoperdon spadiceum*, which is brown, are not uncommon. Fairy Clubs, which are mostly white or yellow, are a feature of some lawns. *Clavulinopsis corniculata* (Fig. E) is much branched, whilst *C. helvola* has simple clubs.

*Lepiota*s, both large and small, come up under shrubs and herbaceous plants. Two of the large ones are the 'Shaggy Parasol' (*Macrolepiota rhacodes*) and an all-white species *Leucoagaricus naucinus*. *Cystolepiota aspera* is medium-sized with a brown scaly cap. *Lepiota cristata* is one of the small ones; it has a whitish cap with brown scales, and a peculiar but distinctive smell.

A few of the larger Cup-fungi are occasionally encountered. *Peziza cerea* may lurk under the greenhouse bench or even grow on damp brick walls. *Tarsetta cupularis* (Fig. F) appears on bare soil in my garden every year from May to Christmas. Soil in plant-pots tends to get covered with moss and some interesting discomycetes, such as *Octospora* and *Lamprospora* species may appear.

If you have a tree such as birch in the garden the number of species and actual number of fruitbodies will probably be much increased, but that is another story.

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(A) *Hygrocybe coccinea* (photo: F Boardman); (B) *Nolanea sericea* (photo: A Outen); (C) *Panaeolina foeniseccii* (photo: A Outen); (D) *Coprinus plicatilis* (photo: A W Brand); (E) *Clavulinopsis corniculata* (photo: A Outen); (F) *Tarzetta cupularis* (photo: P Roseblade).