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## ILLUSTRATING FUNGI 7

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### BACKGROUNDS FOR PAINTINGS

It is quite probable that most of your fungi paintings are undertaken purely for your own reference file, and are never produced with the idea of framing them. But I would hope that just sometimes you aspire to producing something which deserves to see the light of day, and on these occasions it is prudent to give the subject rather more thought than you usually do, for this time your chosen specimen is to be turned into a picture, which will be seen by many for years to come.

Now what is it that turns a specimen fungus into an attractive picture? The answer is the background which accompanies your specimen. If there is a total absence of background, you are left with a botanical study which might be accurate in its detail, but cannot be called a picture. (See first illustration). To produce a picture you need a background, a colour scheme, and a pleasing composition. The first two things need to be considered together. You have your specimen which will be the focal point of the picture, and anything else you introduce into the scene must harmonize with it in colour, not clash or compete for attention.

Look now at the illustrations with this article. I have collected a pair of *Lepista nuda* and painted them with different backgrounds so that you can see what a difference it makes. Try not to view the page as a whole, but isolate each picture and try to imagine it in a frame. Which one appeals?

The first one was painted in watercolour purely as a botanical study, and therefore it looks suspended in space. The second painted with a selection of foliage which was growing round it, clustered underneath. Typically the *Lepista* had pushed itself up through moss, ivy and dead leaves, and was growing in an ancient orchard. Nearby other specimens were growing on a grassy bank, but still had this same plant matter in amongst the grass. (See no. 3). With this painting, I chose to draw the subject in pen and ink, and simply to wash in watercolour to show how different this looks. When adding a background colour wash like this, it is a useful dodge to use an art Masking Fluid. It comes in small jars and to use it, you first draw the subject in outline and then paint it with the masking fluid. Once this is *totally* dry, the background colour can be washed right over the fungi. Then once the wash is dry, the masking fluid can be rubbed off with a finger, or old rubber, and the paper underneath is left pure white and with its surface unimpaired. The fungus itself can now be painted in the normal way.

To the fourth picture was added a background of habitat drawn in pencil, instead of being painted. This can be a very effective combination. The *Lepista* stand out well from the scene because they are in colour, but all the relevant detail of habitat is included. This combination is especially useful if time is short, or if you are worried about introducing extra colours to your fungi painting. Whilst on the subject of colour, the paints mixed for the caps were Warm Sepia and Indian Red, and for the amethyst shading on the stipes, I mixed Magenta and French Ultramarine.

In showing these four paintings, it is not intended that there is a right or wrong way of putting in a background, for it is all a matter of personal preference. They have produced as a "starter kit" of ideas to incorporate in your work.

For my final article in April, I will be discussing the use of pen and ink with watercolour.

