



Bird's Nest fungi

Nidulariaceae family

Sacs of spores sit inside a cup structure resembling eggs in a tiny nest. Spores are spread by rain splashing them out.



Redlead Roundhead

Leratiomyces ceres

Highly distinctive Australian native, with brick-red caps edged white; its gills drop purplish brown spores.



Cup fungi

Sarcoscyphaceae family

Small cups with a smooth inner lining that shoots out spores. Cups attach themselves to woodchip via a short stalk.

Wildlife

Befriend the fungi in your mulch

These friendly saprophytes will unlock the power of your mulch for plants, soil and wildlife alike

Using shredded woody waste – including woodchip and chipped bark – as garden mulch is good practice to improve plant health and regulate soil moisture levels. However, the nutrition within it only becomes available for plants to use because of the power of saprophytic fungi. These useful organisms feed on dead plant material and break down complex polymers in wood such as lignin and cellulose, liberating nutrients and making spaces that plants and wildlife can use.

You can spot these friendly fungi when they form fruiting bodies, which are their spore-bearing reproductive structures. Often these are mushrooms, where fungi produce and release millions of spores into the air from a cap on a stalk. However, they can produce many other fascinating forms. Bird's Nest fungi, for instance, create sacs of spores inside tiny 'nests', while stinkhorns and inkcaps turn into inky liquid dispersed by wildlife. Look out for these interestingly shaped fungal forms – and befriend the fungi that support wildlife and improve the health of garden plants and soil.

Environmentally, it's best to choose British-grown shredded woody waste, or make your own whenever possible.

It can also be fun to make a spore print by placing a mushroom's cap on a sheet of black or white paper under a jar to keep it moist. Carefully remove the cap after a few hours to see the spore colour and pattern beneath. Be sure always to wash your hands after handling fungi. **o**



Hare's Foot Inkcap

Coprinosia lagopus

Emerge as furry caps, expanding and turning inside out within a day. They then self-digest into inky liquid which contain the spores.



Black Morels

Morchella elata

Pitted, pointy caps sit on a stout stalk, shooting out spores from the cap surface when a breeze blows.



Cucumber Cap

Macrocyttidia cucumis

Translucent chocolate-brown caps with pale edges; caps feel smooth to the touch and smell like cucumbers.

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