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Fungus of the Month - January 2006



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Neolentinus dactyloides

Very few fungi fruit in the summer. However, *Neolentinus dactyloides* and several other species fruit prolifically following bushfires. Although it is a wood decay fungus, the fruit body develops from a large underground organ called a sclerotium. The sclerotium has a thick root-like structure (*Inset, above left*) and develops in the soil close to buried wood or dead roots that the fungus is decomposing. The fruit body is mushroom-like (*above*) and develops from the top of the sclerotium. The mushrooms appear to develop only following fire, but how fire stimulates their development is not known. Several days after a fire in karri forest, large numbers of *N. dactyloides* mushrooms may be seen. Caps range in size from 5-15 cm, are orange-brown in colour with a finely woolly or matted texture. They are often topped with ash that settles on the upper surface as they push their way through the soil. The sclerotium may extend up to 40 cm or so into the soil. The whole fungus may weigh up to 3 kg.

The Latin name – what it means: *dactyl* – finger, *-oides* – resembling or similar to.