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Fungus of the Month - March 2007



Pisolithus albus

Pisolithus albus, or white dye-ball fungus, belongs to a group of fungi commonly referred to as Earth balls. It fruits in late summer, when large fruit bodies up to about 20 cm diameter are very common on the gravel verges of highways and country roads. The fruit body is initially round and firm, and the inner tissue has a tightly-packed cellular structure of varying shades from khaki to yellow to orange (*inset*) that gradually develops into a powdery brown spore mass from the top down. As the fruit body matures the outer skin on the top cracks and flakes away exposing the spore mass, which is then blown away in the wind. Its common name refers to its use as a source of dye. Fresh, firm specimens of most species of *Pisolithus* yield a khaki dye that was once used in some European countries to dye military uniforms. Today they still remain a popular source of dye for those who practice traditional methods using natural products.

The Latin name – what it means: *Pis-* pea, *lith-* stone, *alb-* white.

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