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Fungus of the Month - March/April 2012



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Cortinarius violaceus - violet cort

Cortinarius violaceus is found in many parts of the world. It appears to favour deciduous forests in Europe, conifer forests in North America and *Nothofagus* (southern beech) forests in New Zealand. In southern Australia it fruits on the ground or in litter of eucalypt forests and woodlands. However, it does not appear to be especially common in Western Australia, but its distinctive colour and size make it easy to recognise. The whole fruit body is dark violet in colour, sometimes so dark it appears to be black. Caps are convex at first then become flat with age, and may be up to 65 mm broad. The gills look crowded, with alternate ones extending only half the distance from the cap margin to the stem, and in older specimens they may have rusty patches on the surface due to mature spores. Stems are generally sturdy, up to 75 mm tall and 15 mm broad. The upper stem may be lighter on colour with fine dark violet scales on the surface. There are a number of *Cortinarius* fungi that are purple or violet, but none are as dark as *C. violaceus*.

The scientific name for the genus refers to the membranous or fragile cobweb-like veil that protects the gills when still in the immature or 'button' stage of development. On *C. violaceus* it is cobweb-like and rapidly deteriorates. *Cortin-*: from *cortina* or curtain, *-ius*: resembling or similar, *viol-*: violet, *-eus*: colour of.