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Fungus of the Month - May 2012



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Amanita muscaria - the fly agaric

Amanita muscaria is not a native fungus. It belongs in the northern hemisphere where it is found in both conifer and hardwood forests. In eastern Australia and New Zealand it is common in pine plantations where it is used as a beneficial partner for radiata pine trees. In parts of Tasmania and Victoria, however, it has spread into native myrtle beech forests. It has never been purposely introduced into Western Australia but in recent years it has been reported, not in pine plantations but in gardens and parks, in areas including the Perth Hills, Manjimup and Margaret River where it is associated with introduced pines, birch and oak trees.

Amanita muscaria is a very distinctive fungus. Caps are large, up to 20 cm diameter, dome-shaped at first then flat and finally up-turned, bright orange-red with white patchy scales on the surface. The gills are white and very crowded. Stems are up to 20 cm tall, thick, white with a distinctive skirt-like veil just below the cap and a bulbous sometimes scaly base. The surface is smooth above the veil and scaly or powdery below.

The scientific name refers to the ancient practice of using a mixture of the mushroom and milk to stupefy flies. *Amanita*-: is an ancient term for mushroom, *musca*-: a fly, *aria*-: possessing, relating to.