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# Fungus of the Month - April 2011



## *Marasmius elegans*

*Marasmius elegans* is a striking fungus found in mid-autumn in eucalypt forests throughout southern Australia. It fruits in tight clusters or singly in small scattered groups, generally amongst thick leaf litter. Mushrooms have a dark chestnut coloured cap with a dry velvet-textured surface. They are dome-shaped at first then expand to a flat cap about 35 to 40 mm across. Gills are white, close together, have various lengths with the longer ones only narrowly attached to the top of the stem. Stem are up to 70 mm tall, slim, smooth, pure white at the apex then dark chestnut below. They have a tough texture and generally a mass of khaki or bluish-green mottled fungal material (mycelium) attached to the base.

If you carefully brush the litter away from the soil where the mushrooms are growing, you can see the mushrooms emerging from mats of mycelium within the well-rotted organic layer. This mycelium is the natural form of the fungus that decomposes litter and the mushrooms are the reproductive structures.

The scientific name emphasises its attractive appearance compared to other species of *Marasmius*: *marasm-*: withered or emaciated, *-ius*: pertaining to or resembling, *elegans-*: elegant or choice.