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## *Ileodictyon gracile* — smooth cage

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*Ileodictyon gracile*, or smooth cage fungus, is common in forests and woodlands, coastal heaths and urban areas throughout the southwest. It belongs to a group commonly referred to as stink horns.

The latticed basket-like structure develops within a spherical receptacle or 'egg' from which it erupts in the later stages of development. The 'eggs' may develop to be about 30mm diameter. They are creamy white with a firm texture and sit on the surface of the ground. The above photo shows several 'eggs' in various stages of development. The cut specimen (*front right*) shows an early stage with the basket developing within a slimy olive-brown mass of spores. The fully developed, but tightly packed, basket eventually erupts (*front left*) and rapidly expands to its full size of about 80mm diameter when the 'egg' splits. The spore mass, which sticks to the lattice structure, has a foul odour that attracts flies and other insects that help to spread the spores.

The scientific name refers to its structure and unpleasant smell. *Illot*:- dirty, unwashed or *illin*:- smeared, *dicty*:- net, *gracil*:- slender.