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Neolentinus dactyloides

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Very few fungi fruit in summer. However, *Neolentinus dactyloides* and several other fire-adapted species fruit prolifically following bushfires.



Although it's a wood decay fungus, the fruit body develops from a large underground organ called a sclerotium (pl. sclerotia). The sclerotium has a thick root-like structure (*left*) and develops in the soil close to buried wood or dead roots that the fungus is decomposing.

The fruit body is mushroom-like (*above*) and develops from the top of the sclerotium. The mushrooms appear to develop only following fire, but how fire stimulates their development isn't known. Several days after a fire in karri forest, large numbers of *Neolentinus dactyloides* mushrooms may be seen. Caps range in size from 5-15cm, have a tough texture, orange-brown in colour with a finely woolly or matted surface. They are often topped with ash that settles on the upper surface as they push their way through the soil. The sclerotium may extend up to 40cm or more into the soil and the whole fungus may weigh as much as 3kg.

The scientific name refers to its tough texture and long finger-like sclerotium. *Neo-*: new, *lent-*: pliable or tenacious, *-inus*: possessing, *dactyl-*: finger, *-oides*: resembling or similar to.