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Artomyces austropiperatus — crowned coral

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Artomyces austropiperatus, or the crowned coral fungus, is common throughout southern Australia. In the southwest of Western Australia it's found in the wetter regions of eucalypt forest and woodlands. It fruits from late autumn through winter on well-rotted wood, which is often hidden under or within deep leaf and twig litter.

The crowned coral fungus has a distinct crown-like branching pattern that gives rise to its common name and makes it easy to distinguish from other coral-like fungi. Fruit bodies are generally 3-8cm tall and up to 7cm broad. The surface of branches is smooth, pinkish beige or fawn in colour with circular crown-like tips. The branched structures may arise from a single stem or several stems may be clustered together and joined or fused at the base. Another distinguishing feature is a lingering peppery taste (which can be experienced if a small piece is crushed and placed on the tip of your tongue—eating it is not recommended).

Similar species, *Artomyces colensoi* and *Artomyces turgidus* also grow on wood and have a similar peppery taste. However both are smaller, have a simpler branching pattern, and have only been recorded in eastern Australia, including Tasmania, and New Zealand; and therefore may not occur in Western Australia.

The scientific name refers to the dense structure and distinctive taste of the fruit body. *Artus-*: close, confined or tight - *myces*: fungus or mushroom, *austro-*: refers to its Australian origins, *piperat-*: peppery.