



## Spotter's Guide to Fungi

We would love to know what fungi you see in your burial ground!

Visit our webpage to find out how to send us your wildlife records:

[www.bit.ly/cfgarecords](http://www.bit.ly/cfgarecords)



### *Russula sp. - Brittlelegill*

Every autumn, burial grounds can erupt with intense splashes of red, yellow and green. These are due to the appearance of brittlegill fungi. There are many varieties of these and they are notoriously hard to tell apart, despite their large size and distinctive colour. Their structure is made up of large cells which tend to make their fruiting body fragile and crumbly, especially their white gills – hence the name brittlegill.



### *Violet Coral and other waxcaps*

These beautiful jewels of the fungi world fruit on the moss-rich grassy areas of burial grounds that haven't been fertilised, which are regularly cut and where cuttings are removed. There are over 50 species of waxcap in the UK and all should be greatly valued as burial grounds are often the last refuge for waxcaps which were once common across our countryside.



*Coprinus comatus* - Lawyer's Wig

This distinctive fungus comes and goes quickly on lawns of burial grounds. If you pick this and leave it overnight, it will turn into a black goo. This explains the origins of its other common name of Shaggy Inkcap – you can actually write with the 'ink' it creates. Boiling will darken the colour, and the addition of phenol will help to preserve it.



*Xylaria polymorpha* – Dead Man's Fingers

If you were to come across this in a spooky wood at dusk, you might think a zombie was about to pounce on you. These bizarre fungi poke out from decaying wood. If you were to open one of the black fruiting bodies up with a sharp knife, you'd be in for a surprise – it's completely white inside.



*Auricularia auricula-judae* - Jelly Ear

It looks like an ear. It feels like an ear. Have a look for this bizarre fungus on elder trees in your local burial ground. Its historical names of 'Fungi Sambuci' and 'Judas Ear' reflect this link with elder – William Shakespeare recounts in his Loves Labours Lost that 'Judas Iscariot' was hanged on an elder tree.



*Lycoperdon perlatum* - Common Puffball

When mature, a hole in the top of this fungus opens up. Thousands of spores shoot out of this hole when the puffball is compressed by a rain-drop, a falling nut or perhaps a human hand. But beware. Some puffball spores have sharp, microscopic spines which can cause severe irritation of the lung.



*Daldinia concentrica* - King Alfred's Cakes

This circular, compact fungus lives mainly on the dead wood of ash trees. As ash trees across Britain die off as a result of the ash die back fungus, this distinctive fungus will likely become much more common for a while but will then disappear as the ash trees also disappear.



*Sarcoscypha* sp. - Scarlet Elf Cup

Look out for this distinctive cup-fungus from January to March on fallen branches in burial grounds, especially those that are covered in feathery moss. On a still dry day, try dropping a grain of sand onto the red surface – you might just see a small cloud of spores rise up.



### *Fly Agaric*

This image of this most recognisable fungus, with its white dots on the vividly red cap, is used as the emoji image for all mushrooms, in the Super Mario games and in the dancing mushroom sequence of Walt Disney's film Fantasia. If your burial ground has pine or birch, look closely for it as it has a symbiotic relationship with these trees. Beware though – it is toxic and will stimulate hallucinations if eaten.

Churchyards, cemeteries and other types of old burial grounds are some of the best places to look for fungi. They often contain the kind of places that fungi thrive on – unfertilised grassland, aging trees, fallen branches and leaf covered ground.

As you begin to take notice of fungi, especially during our cool and damp autumns when most of the fruitbodies of fungi appear, you start to discover them everywhere.

There are over 15,000 different species of fungi that produce fruiting bodies in the UK. iNaturalist is a free app for your phone that helps you identify what you have seen.

We have set up our own project on this app called 'Beautiful Burial Grounds': if you give it a go we look forward to seeing what you find! For more information on submitting records please visit [www.bit.ly/cfgarecords](http://www.bit.ly/cfgarecords)

Thank you to Bruce Langridge, Head of Interpretation, National Botanic Garden of Wales for inspiring us about fungi over many years, and supplying the information and images for this guide.