

# Photographing Mushrooms for Identification

by Joel Kershner

Members photograph specimens for their own records, or to ask BMC members for help with identification, or just to share prize finds with others. Regardless of your purpose, following these steps should generate satisfying results.

## 1. Take a Sharp Photograph

Learn how to use the close-up feature of your camera so your photos will be in focus. Even inexpensive digital cameras usually have a setting for close-ups. Search the menus or the manual, and practice before you go into the field. Your camera probably also has a digital macro setting, which allows you to get really close. While that setting reduces the quality of a printed photo, it should be fine for uploading to the Web.

Take at least 4 photographs: the cap ("pileus"); the stalk ("stipe") including the complete base; the underside of the cap (i.e. the gills, pores, or teeth) or the inside if, for instance, it's a puffball; the whole fungus in the context it's growing.

Place a coin, or other object of known size, next to the fungus in the photographs. Knives vary in size, so if you use one to indicate size, note its blade length on the **Fungus Description Sheet**.

When you're taking a close-up, the features of the mushroom that you want to be clearly in focus, such as gills, should be within a short focal distance of each other. You should be able to verify this on your LCD screen after you've take the photo.

Manually increase the "film" speed to ASA800 or even 1600 if the light is too dim to get a good photo or you're having trouble getting various parts of the mushroom in focus. (Make sure to set it back to its initial setting when you're done.)

In low light or for really close-ups, use a very small tripod to eliminate camera shake. You can also brace your elbows on the ground or your knees to stabilize the camera.

As flash is likely to wash out the colors, set the camera to not flash when taking close-ups. If necessary, move the fungus to an area in better light.

Review your photographs on the LCD screen after you take them and zoom in to see if they're in focus. Take more if needed.

## 2. Describe Attributes Not Shown in the Photos

Save the attached **Fungus Description Sheet** on your computer as a template for future use. Even better, take a few with you in your backpack or collecting basket so you can enter descriptive features while they're still fresh in your mind.

Try to key out the mushroom yourself. If you think you've identified it or are on the right track, don't be afraid to take an educated guess. If you are not correct, a knowledgeable responder may explain why, which is just as enlightening as finding out that it is the correct species.

### **3. Upload Your Photos to a Website**

Download your digital mushroom pictures onto your computer. For posting on a website it's best to save them at a low resolution. That way, they won't take so long to upload and won't use too much of your account's website capacity.

Attaching photos to an email is not a desirable alternative. It's clunky for recipients to return to the email to open each photo, and photos eat up their email capacity. The best method is to copy and paste a link into your email that will take the reader to a website where you've posted the photos. You could use any number of sites, such as Flickr, Picasa, Shutterfly, Walgreens, etc. To reach the largest number of mycology folk to help with identification, you can become a user and post photos on [www.mushroomobserver.org](http://www.mushroomobserver.org). To learn more, go to [http://mushroomobserver.org/observer/how\\_to\\_use](http://mushroomobserver.org/observer/how_to_use)

The following steps explain how to post photos on Flickr.

Go to [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) and click *Create an account*. If you have a Yahoo account just use your Yahoo login. You now have a Flickr account. Customizing your profile if you wish. To check the security settings, in the upper right screen, click your login name, and then click *Privacy and permissions*.

You are ready to upload pictures. On your Flickr home page, click *Upload Your First Pictures*, then click *Choose Photos and Videos*. When the usual directory window pops up, select the pictures you want to upload. You can then set privacy, which could be "anybody". Below is an example of a useful set of photographs that have been uploaded to a member's flickr.com site for identification purposes. You can cut and paste this link into your web browser address bar to view them:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/53722853@N05/sets/72157624859120449/>

You can add captions and titles and so forth. For mushroom ID postings, it is best to arrange the photos in groups. Above the *Add To Set* window, to the right, click *Create a New Set*. Type a name for your set. Click *Save*, and that's almost it.

### **4. Send an Email to [Bmc-Mushroom@Yahoogroups.com](mailto:Bmc-Mushroom@Yahoogroups.com)**

To post a link to your new set, open the set. In the address bar, highlight the address, and paste it in your email. Your email should also attach a *Fungus Description Sheet*. (See #2 above, and the MS Word template below.)

You can also bring your camera with the images to a BMC identification session, particularly if the fungus deteriorates by the time you come to the session.

## FUNGUS DESCRIPTION SHEET

1. Date collected:
2. Geographical location:
3. Growing on, under, or in association with (type of tree or plants):

4. Cap width:                      Stalk length & width:  
(try to include coin in the photos for comparison.)

5. Use adjectives to describe the look and/or feel of the **cap** and **stalk**:  
(hairy, smooth, fleshy, fibrous, leathery, gelatinous, cracking, etc....)

CAP:

STALK:

5. Describe the **gills, pores, or interior**, if it doesn't have an underside:  
(crowded, thin, narrow, attached to stalk or free, milky, forked, etc...)

6. **Other features** not evident from the photos: (odor; change color when cut or touched; color if not evident from the photos; the number of specimens in the area; spore color seen on adjacent caps or from spore print; etc)

NOTE the length of the knife blade, if you used that for size comparison.