

Glorious Fungus Time by Fran Benton

Last year I started a project to take a picture of every kind of mushroom I found in my garden. I stuck with it until some fossil hunting distracted me. Then I decided to document every type of fossil I have. Then I got confused and gave up.

This year has thrown me a gorgeous surprise! The biggest mushroom I have ever seen appeared at the corner of a raised bed. This guy was a monster and was identified by Dustin, the Mill Bay Garden Club's official mushroom man. Dustin says this brute of a fungus is called The Prince. Now I thought that was a recently departed rock star but hey, it's a mushroom too!



Doing some online research revealed that The Prince is officially *Agaricus Augustus*. For those of you who enjoy details it's in the Basidiomycetes group- now I ask you, who would not want to be in that social group?

The Prince is found mostly in the Pacific Northwest and curiously does not grow under trees in forests but prefers slightly disturbed areas – like my raised bed! I think most people know that mushrooms are the fruiting body of an extensive underground fungal network

known as the mycelium. Picking mushrooms does not hurt the mycelium any more that picking apples damages the tree. The Prince is edible according to the books. I know quite a few people who forage for wild mushrooms with great success. I like to forage for Chanterelles but that's as far as I trust myself. I notice that foraging at the local grocery store also yields good results!

The spores of a big mushroom like this make really interesting colour prints on paper. If you snap the cap off a mushroom and put it gill side down on the paper it will release its spores. They will reflect the pattern of the mushroom's underside. You may notice that some mushrooms have gills, some have pores and some have veins.

It also helps to identify mushrooms by taking a peep under their cap. Some will have a veil (like prince) and some have a ring of fungal tissue around their stem. All these things can help you identify your garden mushrooms.

