

# The mystery of mushrooms

With their sudden appearance and earthy fragrances, fungi capture the imagination and the essence of autumn.

**WESTERN** Victoria's forests and natural environments are a hotspot for a great diversity of fungi both beautiful and bizarre. Roaming the autumn forests in search of these autumn delights is an increasingly popular Australian pastime. While fungi have mostly been the domain of naturalists, foragers are discovering the delights of wild edible fungi.

Humans have foraged for wild foods since time began, before cultivation and agriculture became the way of life for most people. Fungi provide subsistence food and cherished delicacies, psychotropics and pharmaceuticals. In developing countries they alleviate hunger and poverty. In the developed world including Australia, they are mostly consumed as a gourmet speciality.

However, those who fancy collecting a few mushies for dinner, take heed. Among the delicious and delightful lurk poisonous species that could land you in hospital or the grave.

Unfortunately the various folkloric sayings about edible fungi always have their poisonous exceptions. However, a delicious bounty of mushrooms awaits those who can differentiate the desirable from the deadly. This requires spending time in forests, being an astute observer and knowing how to make definitive identifications.

Alison Pouliot (pictured) is an ecologist and environmental photographer who runs mushroom workshops in Australia and Europe. This autumn, Alison will be leading a variety of forays around the state. Participants will learn about



The blewit (*Lepista nuda*) is a tasty edible but must be well-cooked before eating.

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ecological and cultural aspects of fungi as well as how to identify edible and toxic fungi in the field. Workshops will be held in Ballan on June 3 and 6, Creswick

on May 1 and June 1, and Trentham on March 30 and 31. Information about these and further workshops can be found at [alisonpouliot.com](http://alisonpouliot.com).