

Brown birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*)[©]



Caps of the brown birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) can grow up to 20 cm in diameter in New Zealand. It has a dry mid-brown coloured surface that turns tacky in wet weather. The under surface is covered with white to off white small pores which look like fine sponge rubber. These become dirty white and then chocolate brown with age or if bruised. The stalk is up to 20 cm high although occasionally they are short and almost barrel-shaped (above right). These barrel-shaped stems have left some wondering if the mushrooms are porcini (*Boletus edulis*) but the ornamentation of black scales on the stalks of the brown birch bolete are nothing like the raised reticulum on porcini stalks. The flesh is white occasionally turning slightly pinkish.

It is very common in New Zealand wherever birch is grown and can be expected to fruit from late summer until early June in warm, sheltered areas providing the soil is moist. The fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) and brown roll rim (*Paxillus involutus*) are commonly found associated with birch (see the poisonous mushroom posters on this web site. However, these poisonous mushrooms look very different to the brown birch bolete and are very unlikely to be confused.



If you intend to go foraging for wild boletes it is important that you do not collect one of the poisonous species. These include *Boletus purpureus*, *Rubroboletus rhodoxanthus*, and *Rubroboletus satanas*. Others such as *Neoboletus luridiformis* (previously known as *Boletus erythropus*) are only edible if cooked properly first. Failure to do so will result in gastric upsets. Others, such as *Tylopilus fellus* (bitter bolete), are simply inedible.

For technical information on the brown birch bolete contact Ian Hall, P.O. Box 268, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand, www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz, truffle1@ihug.co.nz

Some further reading

Hall, I.R.; Stephenson, S.; Buchanan, P.; Wang, Y.; Cole, A.L.J. 2003. Edible and poisonous mushrooms of the world. Timber Press, Portland. 371 p.

Ceps: Know your Boletus. 2013. Hunter gatherer cookbook. http://huntergathercook.typepad.com/huntergathering_wild_fres/2010/09/ceps-know-your-boletus.html

Wikipedia *Leccinum scabrum*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leccinum_scabrum



Birches in South Dunedin that invariably produce birch bolete

In Europe the brown birch bolete is rapidly infested by fly larvae which spread up the stalks from the soil. These larvae take with them bacteria which rapidly decay the mushrooms. Despite this the brown birch bolete is considered "an excellent eating species" by the CeltNet Wild Foods Guide. In New Zealand, the brown birch bolete tends to become infested with larvae only when it is quite mature perhaps because there are fewer pests in New Zealand. The silver birch is widely grown in New Zealand as an ornamental. Fruiting on trees growing in the wild seems to begin about 8 years after planting. However, our rapidly growing radiata pines inoculated with the saffron milk cap begin fruiting after 12 to 18 months. We are therefore hopeful that the birch bolete will do likewise.



Birch bolete mycelium