



Mushroom mystery answer

THE MYSTERIOUS group of mushrooms which formed in a near-perfect circle in an Ayr backyard have been identified as lilac blewit.

Senior mycologist, Nigel Fehner, who studies the genetic structure and biochemical properties of fungi, said the mushrooms are likely to unpredictably sprout up in any backyard.

"This mushroom is called *Lepista sublilacina*, although recent molecular research seems to indicate that it should belong to a genus called *Clitocybe*," he said. "The common name is lilac blewit.

"According to Jeanette Bowers, blewits is a corruption of 'blue hat', however Wiktionary online indicates that the word 'bluette', as used in the Italian language, refers to a colour between intense sky blue and electric blue.

"Most species are more of a purple than a blue though, particularly in lilac or lavender tones. The intense purple fades out over time. The species is saprophytic, meaning that it breaks down dead organic matter to get the nutrients it requires to live and grow.

"It is quite common in lawns and I have seen it growing in composted/mulched garden beds. It sometimes occurs as a small group,

but often grows as a fairy ring. There is no predicting when, or where, the mushrooms will next emerge," he said.

"Individual fruit bodies can get up to 80mm in diameter, though usually less. Like the edible mushrooms, *Agaricus*, which you can buy in the shops, *Lepista* are also gill-bearing mushrooms.

"The gills are a pale pinkish colour, as is the spore print that they drop. To the best of my knowledge, the edibility of *Lepista sublilacina* has not been ascertained."

Last week, James Cook University Mycologist, Dr Sandra Abell-Davis suggested the pieces would be hard to determine unless it was examined under a microscope.

She added that she thought they were probably *cortinari* *archerii* or *hygrocybe* mushrooms.

"The fairy ring will increase each time they fruit," she said.

"They are using the nutrients in that area and breaking down the old grass inside the ring and moving further out."

Dr Abell-Davis said the mushrooms had grown up out of the ground because they were reproducing.

"The living and eating part of the fungi, you can't see because there are little threads growing through the soil and grass litter.

"In simple terms, the male and female, although technically, we don't call them that, have actually woven together and formed the structure, which is the mushroom."

Dr Abell-Davis said the luscious green grass inside the ring was probably caused by old mushroom breaking down, which results in nutrient-rich soil.

She said the mushrooms could also be poisonous and warned against touching or eating them.

Dr Abell-Davis said there was lots of folklore attached to fairy rings. European superstitions warn against entering fairy rings.

**Regina Lovic
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