FIRST STEPS

FUNGI IN GARDENS

A few fungi are to be found in even a very small garden. These will mostly be common species, but be prepared for anything. My former garden produced the only British collection of a subterranean puffball, Gasterosporium simplex. It is well worth while becoming really familiar with your garden species so that they, and their relatives, can be recognized when you see them in other places. Nearly all gardens have a lawn and at some time or other there is sure to be a fairy-ring. Usually the ring is caused by the ‘Fairy-ring Champignon’ (Marasmius oreades), but many other fungi form rings in grass. You may be fortunate, as I once was, to have a ring of the ‘St George’s Mushroom’ (Calocybe gambosa), an edible fungus that appears in the last week of April. Clitocybe rivulosa, a small, whitish toadstool which is poisonous, commonly forms small rings on lawns near where I live. Wax-caps or Hygrocybe species occur on long-established lawns especially in late autumn after grass cutting has finished. They range in colour from yellow to orange and red, such as the ‘Scarlet Hood’, H. coccinea (Fig. A); the ‘Parrot Wax-cap’, H. psittacina, is green and yellow and very slimy. Several small Mycena species appear in troops; these include M. aerites, grey with a nitrous smell, and the white and yellow M. flavoalba. If the lawn is mossy there will surely be fruitbodies of a tiny toadstool with decurrent gills, called Rickenella fibula.

All the species mentioned so far have white spores. Two species of Nolanea frequently found have dark-coloured caps and pink spores. The ‘Silky Nolanea’, N. sericea (Fig. B) has a strong mealy smell whereas N. stauropsora has little smell; they are readily distinguished on their spore shapes. A little brown toadstool, the ‘Brown Hay Cap’, Panellus jansensii (Fig. C) is one of the commonest species in short grass from spring to autumn. My favourite is the ‘Little Jap Umbrella’, Coprinus picatilis (Fig. D) which has black spores. The Field Mushroom (A. campestris) is sometimes found in gardens, but beware of the ‘Yellow-staining Mushroom’ (A. xanthoderma), which may occur too and can cause great discomfort when eaten.

Puffballs also occur. Vascellum pratense, which is white, and Lycoperdon spadiceum, which is brown, are not uncommon. Fairy Clubs, which are mostly white or yellow, are a feature of some lawns. Clavulinopsis corniculata (Fig. E) is much branched, whilst C. helvola has simple clubs.

Lepiota, both large and small, come up under shrubs and herbaceous plants. Two of the large ones are the ‘Shaggy Parasol’ (Macrolepiota rhododes) and an all-white species Leucoagaricus naucinus. Cystelepiota aspera is medium-sized with a brown scaly cap. Lepiota cristata is one of the small ones; it has a whitish cap with brown scales, and a peculiar but distinctive smell.

A few of the larger Cup-fungi are occasionally encountered. Peziza cerea may lurk under the greenhouse bench or even grow on damp brick walls. Tarzetta cupularis (Fig. F) appears on bare soil in my garden every year from May to Christmas. Soil in plant-pots tends to get covered with moss and some interesting discomycetes, such as Octosporea and Lamprospora species may appear.

If you have a tree such as birch in the garden the number of species and actual number of fruitbodies will probably be much increased, but that is another story.

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(A) Hygrocybe coccinea (photo: F Boardman); (B) Nolanea sericea (photo: A Outen); (C) Panaeolina foenisecii (photo: A Outen); (D) Coprinus piciformis (photo: A W Brand); (E) Clavulinopsis corniculata (photo: A Outen); (F) Tarzetta cupularis (photo: P Roseblade).