

School-to-Nature



Shelf Mushrooms

(also called Shelf Fungus or Shelf Lichen)

It's easy to understand how Shelf Mushrooms get that name, because they grow and look just like shelves. They grow attached to mature weak trees or to rotting wood, and they can be found in most woods, and in all the Conservancy woodlands. Finding Shelf Mushrooms on a tree usually means the tree has poor health and that it will die, or already has. In the lumber industry, any tree "infected" with shelf mushrooms is considered a loss for harvesting, because the presence of these mushrooms means the tree already has problems inside.

One of the best times to look for any kinds of mushrooms in Wisconsin, including types of shelf fungus, is late summer to early Fall. This type of fungus is best described as mushrooms without a central stem. They come in a large range of colors and sizes; several are edible, but most are not and are very tough. Mushroom types, including these, are not easy to identify, even with photos; never taste any, unless you're absolutely sure. It takes a lot of experience and knowledge to correctly identify the edible varieties of any type of fungi. It can be a matter of sickness or even death to taste without this knowledge—so enjoy their beauty without touching or tasting.

As they grow annually, Shelf Mushrooms usually put on two new layers of spore tissue at the edge each shelf. These "rings" of tissue can be counted to determine approximate age. To know a Shelf Mushroom's age in years, you can count rings of tissue. Hopefully you will see Shelf Mushrooms when you hike through Conservancy woods in the late summer or autumn.



October 2022 BH / DL

Caledonia Conservancy | P.O. Box 044714 | Racine, WI | 53404
262-498-4993 | www.CaledoniaConservancy.org