

## Mushrooms as Accent Plants

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By Will Heath

As bonsaiists, we spend a great deal of time studying trees in their natural environment. We observe their beauty as we drive past them when we commute, and we rejoice in their splendour as we walk through the woods and forests.

Many of us widen our vision even further and see not only the tree, but also the micro and macro environments that the trees grow in. We see the under-story plants, the natural accents, we see the symbiotic relationships that the trees in nature share with the ferns, the moss, the lichen, and other plants. This "sharing" of growing space is what we attempt to duplicate when we use accents in our bonsai displays.

We attempt to match our accents with the bonsai by using plants that grow in the same climate, plants that show the same season presented, and plants that harmonize with the bonsai as well.

Unfortunately, like many people, we have blinders on when it comes to mushrooms. Mushrooms are everywhere and have been a natural accompaniment to trees since before mankind first walked through the forests.

Mushrooms come in many different sizes, shapes, and colours. They are a constant part of nature, some call them the unseen wildflowers because of their latent beauty and striking colours that range from translucent to a complete rainbow of colours including green, blue, red, yellow, brown, white, and variations on all.

In the following photo essay, I will attempt to show the inherent beauty of mushrooms and their usefulness as natural accents for bonsai through the use of photos of mushrooms growing in their natural environment, of some that pay surprise visits in our bonsai pots, and lastly, of some that were cultivated specifically for use as accents and as kusamono.

Afterward, you can decide if we indeed have overlooked mushrooms as accents for our bonsai and if they have a place in our art.



Yellow Orange Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria* var. *formosa*)

Photograph by Will Heath

The Fly Agarics' are quite famous throughout history and are featured in many works of art and literary works. Most notably, the caterpillar that Alice talks to in "Through the Looking Glass" is seated on one. Noted by many for the toxic compounds which cause sweating, deep sleep, and disorientation.



Fading Scarlet Waxy Cap (*Hygrophorus marginatus*)

Photograph by Fiona Wallace

Fiona Wallace captured the beauty of the Fading Scarlet Waxy Cap mushroom in a sheep field. The *Hygrophorus marginatus* is also known as *Hygrocybe miniata* and the common name, Fading Scarlet Waxy Cap, comes from the colour which fades from a brilliant scarlet to an orange or pale yellow.



Destroying Angel (*Amanita virosa*)

Photograph by Will Heath

An aptly named mushroom growing in the northern woods of Michigan. The Destroying Angel is one of the most beautiful and deadliest mushrooms known to man and can cause kidney and/or liver failure within 24 hours after ingestion.



Scarlet Cup (*Sarcoscypha coccinea*)

Photograph by Kev Bailey

The Scarlet Cup is always a welcome sight in the woods, its cup shape and scarlet color adds warmth to the under story. This is one of the mushrooms that grow directly on wood, without these types of mushrooms we would be up to our necks in deadwood.



*Mycena amicta*

Photograph by Morten Albek

These beautiful mushrooms show up yearly in the pot of a Juniper owned by Morten Albek. He never touches them, as he prefers to leave them alone and enjoy their visit.



Lemon-Yellow Lepiota (*Lepiota lutea*)

Photograph by Carl Rosner

The Lemon-Yellow Lepiota has the habit of growing on the ground in leaf litter and compost and is known well in green houses and also in houseplants.

Back in 2004, while discussing mushrooms growing in bonsai pots on another forum, I mentioned the thought of using mushrooms as accents and the following discussion was a positive one. Carl posted this picture of a mushroom there that had appeared overnight in the pot of a ficus that he was growing in a green house and asked for identification. This picture and the discussion of mushrooms then was what gave me the energy and devotion to continue my cultivation attempts.



Honey Mushroom (*Armillariella mellea*)

Photograph by Don Ziemann

This forest of Honey Mushrooms was brought to a club meeting where Don Ziemann took a photograph of them. Although not cultivated and simply lifted from the ground and placed in a pot, the image is a magical one of a fairy forests consisting of mushrooms. The Honey Mushroom is a choice edible and is gathered by many around the world. The Honey Mushroom also holds the world record for the largest living organism which grows right here in Michigan. One specimen was estimated to be over 450 years old.



Common Psathyrella (*Psathyrella candolleana*)

Photograph by Will Heath

The Common Psathyrella processes all the attributes of what is commonly regarded as a mushroom, the cap, the stalk, and the brown colour all say mushroom loudly. Nether ugly nor distracting, I find its visual use as an accent to be near perfect.



Common Psathyrella (*Psathyrella candolleana*)

Photograph by Will Heath

A closeup of the mushrooms. The mature mushrooms show signs of age while the younger ones speak of the freshness of birth.



Alcohol Inky (*Coprinus atramentarius*)

Photograph by Will Heath

The Alcohol Inky is a choice edible as well but one must not consume alcohol after eating them because the combination can make you very ill. The remnants of a universal veil can be seen still flaking from the caps, adding white colour and accenting the mushroom as well.



Alcohol Inky (*Coprinus atramentarius*)

Photograph by Will Heath

Another angle of these cultivated in a piece of driftwood with moss. Standing alone or as an accent, the contrast between the deadwood, the mushrooms, and the lush moss makes for a pleasing visual experience.



Alcohol Inky (*Coprinus atramentarius*)

Photograph by Will Heath

Looking closer, we can better see the grouping of the mushrooms and the subtle interplay of colors.