

POST-HOLIDAY STINKHORNS OR WHAT'S THAT SMELL?

By Ralph E. Mitchell

Is there a peculiar smell in your yard these days that you just can't put your finger on? Does it smell like a full diaper on a hot sunny day? Have you traced the smell back to a horn-shaped mushroom? I present to you the stinkhorn! Once you have read this article, you will not have to bring it into our office for identification. To smell a stinkhorn is to know a stinkhorn!

Stinkhorns are mushrooms similar to fungi known as puffballs, earthstars, and bird's nest fungi. The stink that they produce is part of their life-cycle strategy where flies attracted to the rotted scent come to feed and then accidentally carry off the stinkhorn spores to other locations. Spores that land on wood mulch or other suitable organic matter, grow and feed on the decaying material. With warmth and wetness, the stinkhorn fungi produce an egg-like growth that is partially hidden underground. From this "egg" a stalk-like, columnar mushroom emerges. At this stage the classic stench is released.

Stinkhorns are really more of a nuisance than a serious pest. There are some management suggestions that can help them. Stinkhorns are a natural part of the Florida ecology that are, in fact, beneficial as they break down organic matter. If needed, close the windows during the time that they are releasing their odor. You can help reduce the spread of spores and cut off the source of the smell by hand-picking these mushrooms before they "open". Wearing gloves, carefully pick it at

the egg stage and dispose in a plastic zipper bag. Removing the mulch down to the soil level may help remove stinkhorn colonies. Also consider changing/reducing your ground cover from a woody mulch material to a "living mulch" of jasmine, liriope, mondo grass, etc. If stinkhorns have been an issue, you may need to keep large mulched areas away from the house.



Kuo, M. (2004, November). *Phallus ravenelii*. Retrieved from *MushroomExpert.Com*. Photo by Sharon Katz.

If all else fails, there are no legal or practical chemical control options - sorry about that! Again, keep in mind that the stinkhorn is not a plant disease and for all practical purposes are a good part of the environment. You may never even encounter one. Let's hope so!

For more information on all types of gardening subjects, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office

is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3rd Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** - 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** - 3rd Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Simone, G.W. (1999) Mistaken Identities for Plant Diseases, - University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service.

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McLaughlin, J. (2003) Help! What On Earth's That in My Yard? - University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service - Miami-Dade.