

# Birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) ©



The cap of the brown birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) can grow up to 20 cm in diameter in New Zealand. It has a dry mid-brown coloured surface that turns tacky in wet weather. The under surface is covered with white to off white small pores which look like fine sponge rubber. These become dirty white and then chocolate brown with age or if bruised. The stalk is up to 20 cm high although occasionally they are short and almost barrel-shaped (above right). These barrel-shaped stems have left some wondering if the mushrooms are porcini (*Boletus edulis*) but the ornamentation of black scales on the stalks of the brown birch bolete are nothing like the raised reticulum on porcini stalks. The flesh is white occasionally turning slightly pinkish.

It is very common in New Zealand wherever birch is grown and can be expected to fruit from late summer until early June in warm, sheltered areas providing the soil is moist. The fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) and brown roll rim (*Paxillus involutus*) are commonly found associated with birch (see the poisonous mushroom posters at [www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz](http://www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz)). However, these poisonous mushrooms look very different to the brown birch bolete and are very unlikely to be confused.

In Europe the brown birch bolete is rapidly infested by fly larvae which spread up the stalks from the soil. These larvae take with them bacteria which rapidly decay the mushrooms. Despite this the brown birch bolete is considered "an excellent eating species" by the Celtnet Wild Foods Guide. In New Zealand, the brown birch bolete tends to become infested with larvae only when it is quite mature perhaps because there are fewer pests in New Zealand.

The silver birch is widely grown in New Zealand as an ornamental. Edible Forest Fungi New Zealand Limited has decided to produce it mycorrhized with the brown birch bolete as an added attraction.



Birch bolete mycorrhizas

Fruiting on trees growing in the wild seems to begin about 8 years after planting. However, our rapidly growing radiata pines inoculated with the saffron milk cap begin fruiting after 12 to 18 months. We are therefore hopeful that the birch bolete will do likewise.

For technical information on the brown birch bolete contact Ian Hall, P.O. Box 268, Dunedin 9054, New Zealand, telephone +64-3-454 3574, +64-27-226 1844, web: [www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz](http://www.trufflesandmushrooms.co.nz), email: [truffle1@ihug.co.nz](mailto:truffle1@ihug.co.nz)

To enquire about the availability of trees mycorrhized with the brown birch bolete please contact Kevin Fearn, Edible Forest Fungi New Zealand Limited, P.O. Box 384, Oamaru 9444, New Zealand, telephone +64-3-431 3627, +64-27-450 4605, web [www.effnz.co.nz](http://www.effnz.co.nz), email: [kevin@oregonnurseries.co.nz](mailto:kevin@oregonnurseries.co.nz)

## Some further reading

Celtnet Wild Foods Guide. 2011. Brown birch bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*), including recipes. [www.celtnet.org.uk/recipes/ancient/wild-food-wentry.php?term=Brown%20Birch%20Bolete](http://www.celtnet.org.uk/recipes/ancient/wild-food-wentry.php?term=Brown%20Birch%20Bolete)

Hall, I.R.; Stephenson, S.; Buchanan, P.; Wang, Y.; Cole, A.L.J. 2003. Edible and poisonous mushrooms of the world. Timber Press, Portland. 371 p.

Fox, F.M. 1986. Groupings of ectomycorrhizal fungi of birch and pine, based on establishment of mycorrhizas on seedlings from spores in unsterile soils. *Transactions of the British mycological society* 87: 371-380.



Birches in South Dunedin that invariably produce birch bolete