



Klamath Network Featured Creature

February 2009

Common Bird's Nest Fungus (*Crucibulum laeve*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

Bird's nest fungi very much resemble their namesake. There are four common genera of this fungus in the Nidulariaceae family, with *Crucibulum laeve* being one of the more common species. The fruiting body ("nest") starts as a nearly round globe with a yellow cushion on top. At maturity, this yellow cap breaks off, revealing a more cylindrical and deeply cup-shaped fruiting body. The cup is about 5-12 mm in diameter and 4-8 mm high. The outside of the fruiting body is velvety, ranging in color from tawny yellow to cinnamon-brown, and may grow smoother and darker or lighter with age. The inside of the nest is smooth and a shiny white or silver gray. The peridioles ("eggs"), 1-2 mm in diameter, are whitish or buff discs and attached to the nest by long thin cords. Bird's nest fungi individuals are gregarious creatures, often found in dense colonies.



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Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

A keen eye will probably find bird's nest fungi in Redwood National and State Parks, Oregon Caves National Monument, Crater Lake National Park, Lassen Volcanic National Park, and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area.

Habitat:

Bird's nest fungi are widely distributed on decaying sticks and logs, vegetable debris, soil, and manure. As saprobic organisms, they help decay the matter on which they grow.



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Reproduction:

Raindrops and animals help disperse the spores of the bird's nest fungus. The nest is a type of splash cup, its shape engineered so that water droplets hit the bottom of the cup with the pressure and angle needed to expel and disperse the egg-shaped peridioles far outside. A single raindrop may eject these "eggs" out as far as 7 feet! These peridioles are carried away through the air, along with a sticky string (funiculus). This filament helps the "egg" to adhere to the surface it lands on, holding it to the ground or wrapping around a branch or twig. Other bird's nest fungus species reside in a sticky jelly in the nest instead of having a funiculus. After landing, the outside of the peridiole decays or is eaten away by insects, exposing the spores inside. Whereas other fungi produce millions of spores, bird's nest fungi produce only a few, all packaged with the correct mating strains. Fertile mycelia develop directly from these spores.

Distribution:

Crucibulum laeve is found throughout North America, Europe, and Australia. Different bird's nest fungus species are evident at different times of the year; the common bird's nest fungus is in fruit from July-October. Other bird's nest fungus species are found in temperate climates all over the world.

Edibility:

Mushrooms Demystified notes that whether or not the fungus is actually edible, it is "much too miniscule to merit being munched on!"

Status:

The common bird's nest fungus is common throughout its range.



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Additional Information:

For more information, visit: [The Mushroom Expert's species page](#) and Mushrooms Demystified (1986) by David Arora (Ten Speed Press, Berkeley).