

Tamagotake (*Amanita caesareoides*)

English Name(s)

Asian Vermilion Caesar

Common

Meaning of Japanese Name

Egg Mushroom. From the egg-like appearance of the cap within the volva in young specimens.

Description

This striking mushroom has a bright, red cap (fading to orange-red in age), with striated margins. The cap (up to about 18 cm in diameter) is initially ovate and then becomes planar and umbonate with age. The gills are orange-yellow, free, and crowded. The stem (up to about 20 cm in length) is covered in red-orange patches and is marked with a large, loosely hanging yellow-orange ring. The base of the stem is surrounded by a large, white volva (cup).



Photo by Jōji Irisa

Grows near certain deciduous (e.g., beech and birch) as well as certain coniferous (e.g., pine) trees.

Season

Usually fruits around mid-July. Occasionally may fruit at the beginning of fall.

Culinary Information

A prized edible, *tamagotake* is known for its strong umami flavor, and is popular in omelets, stir fries, simmered dishes, soups, raw and sliced thin with olive oil and lemon, or cooked along with rice in *takikomi-gohan*. The volva, lightly fried, is reportedly delicious.

The fresh mushroom is damaged easily and does not travel well.

Lookalikes and Related Species

Beginners may mistake *tamagotake* for *beni-tengutake* (*Amanita muscaria*, fly agaric), but the presence of a large, white volva (cup) at *tamagotake*'s base, as well as the yellow-red ring and patches on its stem, should be major differentiators to tell it apart from *beni-tengutake*.

There are several mushrooms that are similar to *tamagotake* but with different colors. *Ki-tamagotake* (*Amanita kitamagotake*) has a bright yellow cap, *miyama-tamagotake* (*Amanita imazekii*) has a striking silver cap, and *fuchidori-tamagotake* (*Amanita rubromarginata*) resembles *tamagotake*, but the gills have reddish-orange edges.

Comments

This mushroom is similar to the North American *Amanita jacksonii*, and was previously classified, incorrectly, as *Amanita hemibapha*.



Photo by Jōji Irisa

Kikurage (*Auricularia* spp.)



Photo by Jōji Irisa

English Common Name(s)

Wood Ear, Jelly Ear, Judas' Ear

Meaning of Japanese Name

Tree Jellyfish. From its jelly-like appearance, and its tendency to grow out of tree bark.

Description

Fruiting bodies (usually up to about 6 cm in diameter and about 3 mm thick) range from light brown to dark brown, and are gelatinous and slightly firm. They may be shaped like floppy ears or inverted cups, and are usually attached to the substrate with little to no stem. The upper side of the fruiting bodies is finely tomentose (i.e., very slightly fuzzy). They generally grow from the decaying wood of deciduous trees.

Season

Generally fruits from spring to autumn, most often in September or later.

Culinary Information

Kikurage has a rubbery texture and is rarely consumed in the West; however, it is a very popular edible in East Asia. In Japan, *kikurage* is most commonly seen as part of local Chinese-inspired cuisine, especially in ramen or stir fries. It is often sold in dehydrated form and rehydrated shortly before use.

Kikurage is common in Japanese supermarkets.

Lookalikes and Related Species

Several species within the genera *Auricularia*, *Tremella*, and *Phaeotremella* may be mistaken for *kikurage*.

Arage-kikurage (*Auricularia nigricans*) has thicker “hairs” than *kikurage* and a more reddish-purple fruiting body. *Hanabira-nikawatake* (*Phaeotremella fimbriata*) tends to be larger, more lightly colored, and much more densely clustered than *kikurage*, and usually coexists with (parasitizes) mushrooms of the *Stereum* genus that are growing on the same wood.

Comments

Until recently, *kikurage* was classified as *Auricularia auricula-judae*—and is in fact macroscopically very similar to that species. However, *kikurage* is due for an official reclassification: recent surveys have shown collected Japanese samples to consist of *Auricularia heimuer*, *Auricularia minutissima*, *Auricularia villosula*, and *Auricularia thailandica*.

Haru-shimeji (*Entoloma clypeatum*)



Photo by Jōji Irisa

English Common Name(s)

Shield Pinkgill

Meaning of Japanese Name

Spring Shimeji

Description

Haru-shimeji has a fibrous, grey-to-greyish-brown cap which is bulbous when young and flattens out as it grows, leaving a raised (broadly umbonate) area in the center. The cap ranges from about 5 to 10 cm in diameter. The gills start as white, and become pink as they mature. The stem (about 5 to 15 cm in length), colored and textured similarly to the cap, tends to fatten towards the base. It often grows under trees in the family *Rosaceae*.

Season

Spring, primarily April and May.

Culinary Information

Popular in soups, simmered dishes, stir fries, and salads, and known for its crisp texture. It's important to fully cook this mushroom before consuming it, as there are reports of food poisoning when it is eaten raw.

Lookalikes and Related Species

Haru-shimeji may resemble the toxic *ippon-shimeji* (*Entoloma sinuatum*, livid pinkgill) or *kusaura-benitake* (*Entoloma rhodopolium*, wood pinkgill), among others. I don't recommend trying to tell them apart until you've learned all of the species in detail; please consult a more detailed field guide.

Comments

This mushroom also goes by the name *shimeji-modoki* (“false shimeji”). The current scientific name, *Entoloma clypeatum*, is due for revision.

Mushroom Mame-Chishiki

Every year in Japan, there are about 25 reported mushroom poisonings in Japan, sometimes including a few cases of death. The most common poisonous mushrooms that are mistakenly consumed are *tsuki-yo-take* (*Omphalotus japonicus*), *kaki-shimeji* (*Tricholoma ustale*), and *kusaura-benitake* (*Entoloma rhodopolium*).