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FROM THE MUSHROOM BASKET: TWO LOAVES ARE BETTER THAN ONE!

Panellus serotinus (Fall Oyster)

Panellus stipticus (Luminescent Panellus)

After several half-hearted ventures years ago into the world of mushrooms, I decided that fungi were just too strange and complex, and that the green world could more easily be understood and appreciated. So it has been. However, in the last seven years attendance at local mushroom forays has somewhat changed my perspective about these denizens of the nether world. Out of the bewildering array of fruiting bodies found in our fields and woods, the wood decay fungi have rekindled a modicum of interest. One of the neatest and “coolest” of these is the Fall Oyster Mushroom.

Panellus serotinus waits for the first autumn frost before it bursts forth from dead and often fallen woody stems, usually of alder and birch. It forms seemingly stem-less plump brackets as viewed from above, brownish to olive-green in colour sometimes with a hint of violet sheen. Individual brackets have been seen in the Pasadena woods up to 8 cm across. While fresh and developing they may appear somewhat tacky or slippery in wet weather, but brownish at maturity and slightly rough to the touch when dry. At first glance they could be mistaken for plump, semi-soft polypores, but the undersides with their prominent thin gills and rudimentary stalks tell us this is one of the gilled wood decay fungi. In fact, recent phylogenetic research has placed the two *Panellus* species very close to the mycena mushrooms, another genus of gilled wood decayers. On the under-surface the in-rolled margin, yellow gills and lateral stalk are characteristic especially the sharp margin between the gills and the reduced stalk. Rapid growth late in the season when slugs, bugs and other thugs are relatively inactive, probably account in part for its fresh and clean appearance. Production of some thug repellent is an additional possibility. Fall Oyster Mushroom is said to be edible but somewhat rubbery unless thoroughly



Figure 1. *Panellus serotinus* (Fall Oyster) Photo by H. Mann



Figure 2. *Panellus serotinus* (Fall Oyster) Photo by H. Mann

cooked over low heat for extended time.

Another common *Panellus* of the Pasadena woods is *P. stipticus*, the Luminescent Panellus, also found most commonly on alder and birch. It can be located throughout the year, even in winter. The overlapping brackets are smaller than those of the Fall Oyster, each usually only 1 – 3 cm across. The upper surface of the fruiting body is tan coloured fading to off-white, often with a mottled appearance. Beneath it is structurally similar to its larger relative. Thin neat brown gills end abruptly at the base of the reduced stalk, as is characteristic of many species of the genus. *P. stipticus* is not edible, but is reported to have bioluminescent gills. I have never been able to coax even a nano-lumen from any of my freshly collected specimens,



Figure 3. *Panellus stipticus* (Luminescent *Panellus*) Photo by H. Mann.

even after spending times of peaceful contemplation with them in a blacked-out basement! Neither, to my knowledge, has anybody else in this province. Possibly both maturity and weather conditions are important in this regard, but it is also possible that we may harbour a cryptic non-luminescent variant.

Other *Panellus* species are encountered less commonly in Newfoundland and Labrador. The name *Panellus* (little loaf) refers to the plump rounded appearance of the fruiting bodies, apparently resembling little loaves of bread. “Serotinus” means “late,” that is, fruiting late in the season. “Stipticus” means haemostatic, indicating that it has been used to staunch blood flow from cuts, although its actual effectiveness is unknown to me. Both species produce a white spore print.

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