

Mushrooms in Our Midst: Wildflowers of the Woods

Photo essay by Y. Hope Osborn



Fairy Tableau

A few years back when I began taking photography seriously, I happened to look down and see what my photographer's brain knew would be a great shot. The slender, slightly curved stem was crowned by a beige

dot-textured cap, and it stood solitary among winter's old leaves.

From then on in whatever woods, usually the moister, I remember not only to look at eye level and above to see and capture great sights.

I scan from the ground up, and the result is a collection of mushroom photos.

Because they come in such a variety of shapes, colors, environment, textures and sizes, I think of them as the wildflowers of the woods.

Mushrooms are merely the fruit body of a network of mycelium (like roots) under the ground. Even when I don't see the mushroom body, it is likely that the network of the mycelium is under my feet and around the roots of the trees.

Most mushrooms have a symbiotic relationship with trees. The mycelium of the mushroom absorbs water, which in turn helps water the tree and the trees provide mushrooms with minerals. While some

At Lake Dardanelle >



mushrooms bolster trees, others break down dead and dying wood in forests.

Mushrooms are fragile creatures easily broken or crushed so, to find these mini wonders, take care where you walk. The best way to see and photograph, if you choose, a mushroom is to set aside convention or what people walking near may think and lie down on your stomach to see the mushrooms at eye level where you may see all of the stem, the gills from which spores are spread, and the cap. Everyone

needs to try this at least once to discover how relaxing it can be to lie down under the shade of the tree on a soft bed of fallen leaves and fragrant pine needles. The woods provide an interesting setting and provision for photogenic mushroom moments from your lowered position.

One day I stumbled upon a “Fairy Tableau” in which a perfect little orange mushroom was set in moss, paired with what looked like a miniature fern, backdropped and protected by



At Mt. Nebo



Near Lake Dardanelle

the rough bark of a pine tree branch. You may have seen shelf mushrooms, which look exactly like that in large patches with variegated lines like the rings of the deadwood upon which they attach. I have seen them blue as the sky, green as new growth and beige as wood within the tree itself. In the Winter 2019-2020 issue of this publication, one of my photos showed mushrooms in the midst of winter setting up

shop on a tree stump in an accumulation of pure white snow.

After a few of these myriad of settings and styles, you too might find yourself crouching or lying down (though I wouldn't recommend doing so in the cold wet of snow) in the quietly creaking woods to, like a rare coin collector, create your own collection of moments of the mushrooms in our midst. ✧