

Mycena – a key to common species found in Leicestershire & Rutland

Mycena is a large genus containing many similar looking species so any key to their identification will inevitably be complex. Most keys solve this problem by dividing the genus into nine groups having features in common, with two more groups, 10 and 11, picking up those that don't fit in elsewhere.

1. Small white caps having a glistening surface as if dusted with icing sugar
2. Having gills with a coloured margin
3. Exuding white or coloured milk when the stem is broken
4. Small species attached to the substrate by some form of basal disc
5. Having a cap with a peel-able skin, either wholly or in part
6. Having a very slimy stem
7. Having decurrent gills
8. Caps with very bright colours
9. Caps white but very small (< 5mm diameter)
10. Others growing on any substrate except wood
11. Others growing only on wood or woody litter

There are around 75 *Mycena* species on the UK check-list and we have recorded some 55 of them in VC55, but some of them have only been recorded once or twice so may be either under-recorded or quite rare.

The following key aims to help LFSG members to name those *Mycena* species that we encounter in VC55, some very common and others less so. It covers some 40 or so species.

Note that some species may key out in more than one group eg. species having both coloured milk and a coloured gill margin. Where this occurs they are listed in both groups.

Group 1: Small white caps having a surface appearing as if dusted with icing sugar:

Mycena adscendens – a tiny white species with cap up to 5mm diameter found on wood bark, sometimes among moss. The stem has no basal disc but the lower part is slightly swollen, like the bulb of a 'spring onion'. This is the only one of this group that is at all common locally.

Mycena corynephora is almost identical but is much less common and needs microscopic examination.

Mycena clavularis could also key out here but it is uncommon and has a basal disc to the stem.

Group 2: Having gills with a coloured margin:

Mycena haematopus is a sturdy looking species and has gills with a red margin, but it also has dark red juice so it also keys out in that group. It usually grows in small clusters directly on stumps or on fallen hardwood.

Mycena sanguinolenta is a slender species and has gills with a red margin, but it also has bright red juice so it keys out again in that group. It grows singly but in large troops on conifer litter.

Mycena rubromarginata is a pinkish brown species which can be quite variable. It usually grows singly on woody litter or occasionally directly on wood bark, most often with broad-leaved trees but can grow with conifers. The gills have a pronounced red margin. Not common locally.

Mycena capillaripes is a slender species with a red-brown gill margin. It grows on litter under conifers but is rarely recorded locally. It is said to have a nitrous or chlorine smell.

Mycena olivaceomarginata has gills with a dull yellow-brown margin. We record it quite frequently on litter or on soil among grasses near to hardwood trees. It is quite easy to identify if the margin is noticed.

Mycena flavescens is a rather uncommon species, usually greyish brown but it can be paler or even pure white. It grows in grassland or on woodland litter, often in small clusters. It has a bright yellow gill margin in young specimens only, so if that feature is absent identification can be difficult.

Mycena citrinomarginata is a very slender delicate species that grows singly or in small groups in good quality grassland. The caps are white, tinged yellow, and the gill margins are lemon yellow.

Group 3: Having white or coloured juice in stem or gill tissues:

Mycena galopus is one of our most common and easily recognised species. It usually has a cream to brownish striate conical cap and a greyish stem which exudes white milk when broken near the base. It grows singly or in loose groups in woody litter.

Mycena galopus var *candida* is pure white so can be difficult to identify unless the white milk is noticed. It is found on litter or soil, often among grasses, either singly or in a small cluster.

Mycena galopus var *nigra* is more sturdy in appearance than either of the above and with a shorter stem. It is dark grey to almost black. It appears singly or in cluster of 2 or 3 and has profuse white milk in the stem.

DNA studies suggest that these three varieties are all the same species but that does not account for the different growth form, the different habitats, the fact that there are never any intermediate forms, and that the varieties are seldom, if ever, found growing with the typical form.

Mycena haematopus has already been described in the group with gills having a red margin. It has profuse claret coloured milk in the stem when broken.

Mycena sanguinolenta has already been described in the group with gills have a red margin. It has bright orange-red milk and associates only with conifers.

Group 4: Small species attached to the substrate by a basal disc:

Mycena bulbosa is a very small white species usually found attached to the dead stems of *Juncus*, usually deep down at the heart of a cluster of stems so it has to be searched for. We only have one county record but this is not an uncommon species and we should find more by diligent searching.

Mycena clavularis is not common. It grows on the bark of fallen wood or on the mossy boles of living trees. It has a disc at the stem base and also has a 'frosted' cap surface that peels off so may also key out other groups.

Mycena stylobates is the most common of this group locally. It is taller than those above and quite slender, with an off-white cap and is attached to the substrate by a disc of radiating woolly white fibrils.

Group 5: Those having a separable cap pellicle (skin), either whole or in part:

Mycena clavularis is a small white species that also keys out under those with a basal disc to the stem.

Mycena epipterygia is the only species we have locally where the colourless cap skin can, with care, be removed completely by gripping the margin with a pair of fine tweezers and gently easing it off. The species can be recognised in the field from its habit of growing in a loose cluster, often among grasses, but occasionally on woody litter. The cap is conical and pale creamy-olive with a greasy shine. The most distinctive feature is the bright yellow colour in the stem, sometimes over the whole length but more often just at the extreme apex.

Mycena vulgaris is greyish brown species, usually growing in a loose cluster among grasses or on woodland litter. The cap skin is sticky and can be peeled off in strips or patches which becomes apparent during dissection. It is also unusual in that the gill margin is glutinous and can be lifted off as a continuous thread.

Mycena amicta has a slightly sticky grey cap skin that may be partly peeled off. This feature is usually noticed when dissecting it for the microscope. Other features are the grey and very pubescent (velvety hairy) stem which can have a pale blue colour at the extreme base. The cap can also have bluish or dark grey patches around the margin. It grows on conifer litter or attached to small conifer wood fragments.

Group 6: Those having a very slimy stem:

Mycena rorida (recently transferred to a new genus called *Roridomyces*) has a slimy white striate cap and a pale greyish stem that carries a thick coating of translucent slime in humid conditions, giving it the common name of Dripping Bonnet. Often recorded on dead bramble stems but also on broad-leaved and conifer woodland litter. In dry weather conditions the slime dries out making identification much more difficult.

Mycena vulgaris has a very greasy stem. It also features under Group 5 as the cap skin can be partially peeled.

Group 7: Those having decurrent gills:

Mycena cinerella is a greyish species with a cap that soon expands and with a strong mealy smell. Can be found in grassy habitats but also in conifer litter. It is a late fruiting species, appearing in early November.

Mycena speirea is common and is found in woody litter and often attached to the bark of fallen trunks and branches, either singly or in loose groups, hence the name Bark Bonnet. It is a small species, about 5mm diameter, and has a cream cap with brownish striations, often with a depressed brown spot in the centre. The gills are decurrent but this is not always obvious. The stem is slender and is usually pale yellow.

Group 8: Those having very bright cap colours: These are species that don't readily key out elsewhere.

Mycena acicula is a very small species with a bright orange cap. It has a contrasting yellow stem and is usually found singly or in small groups among moss on litter or on fallen wood.

Mycena adonis is an uncommon species that appears to favour unimproved grassland or soil. The caps are small to medium and are usually bright crimson red with a contrasting white stem. They can grow in a small cluster. The species can be quite variable with red, pink or white caps, often within the same cluster.

Mycena pura is common and usually easy to identify in the field. It is more sturdy than most of the genus and has a distinctive lilac-purple colour. The cap colour can range from pinkish brown to lilac purple. The flesh has a radish smell when crushed. Usually found growing with oak or beech.

Mycena rosea is larger than most of the genus and is unmistakable with a rose-pink cap and a thick white stem that tapers from the wide base to the apex. It favours broad-leaved woods.

Group 9: Species with small smooth whitish caps seldom exceeding 5mm diameter:

Mycena hiemalis is rather like *M. speirea* but the caps may be a little larger, with faint brown striations, however the gills are never decurrent. The species grows on woody litter but also directly on mossy wood. It is not common locally and collections should be checked with a microscope.

Mycena capillaris is only found attached to fallen dead beech leaves. The distinctive features are the tiny white cap and a very long slender stem. It can only be confused with *M. polyadelpha*.

Mycena polyadelpha appears identical to *M. capillaris* but grows only on fallen dead oak leaves.

We are now left with two 'catch-all' groups having similar characters but growing on different substrates. Both groups include white caps which can exceed 5mm diameter, together with various nondescript grey to grey-brown caps that don't fit into the previous 9 categories.

Group 10: Those found on a substrate other than wood, but in some cases including woodland litter:

Mycena aetites is similar to *M. leptcephala* but can be darker in colour and the flesh does not smell of bleach but faintly grassy when crushed. It is usually found in lawns and grassland and has an open conical shape with dark radial striations, occasionally appearing almost black.

Mycena filopes is very common locally and grows in leaf litter in woodlands but can also be found on decaying vegetation in soil and grassy areas. It is a small species but quite variable in size colour and usually has a long slender stem. The cap is campanulate and usually has an olive-greyish tinge, rather than shades of pink or brown. It is one of those species that develops an idioform smell as it dries out (like that of doctors' surgeries).

Mycena leptcephala is a grey species with an open conical cap and with a strong nitrous smell which may also be described as of bleach or chlorine, or of crushed poppy leaves. It is quite common and grows singly or in loose groups on litter in broad-leaved woodlands. It sometimes grows attached to fallen twigs so is also included in Group 11. It is not found in grassland so is unlikely to be confused with the similar *M. aetites*.

Mycena luteoalba (formerly *M. flavoalba*) is a quite common small species growing with moss in garden lawns and grasslands. It is distinctive in having pale yellow colours and it grows in loose clusters. The stems are quite short and the caps soon expand and tend to curl up as they age.

Mycena metata develops a similar idioform smell to *M. filopes* but it differs in several respects. The conical cap has a pinkish-brown tinge, not at all greyish, and in the UK check-list the habitat is said to be litter in conifer woodlands, though other books say that it can also be found with hardwoods and this is our local experience.

Mycena polygramma is a grey look-alike of *M. galericulata* which can have a striate silvery stem. It is included here because it is often found growing apparently on soil or on woodland litter but it is almost always attached to buried twigs and wood fragments so really belongs in group 11, where it is described more fully.

Mycena vitilis is one of our most common species and can be found on leaf litter as well as attached to fallen twigs and branch fragments so is included in groups 10 and 11. It is a small to medium species, usually growing singly, and having an open conical cap with a central papilla (a raised pimple). It is usually pale brown but the papilla is darker, and the whole cap shines as if greasy. With practice it is quite easy to identify in the field.

Group 11: Those growing on woody substrates including the bark or roots of living trees:

Mycena arcangeliana (formerly *M. oortiana*) is one of our most frequently recorded species and has the habit of growing in clusters attached to part-buried fallen twigs. It may also be found on the bark of fallen trunks and branches. It is a medium size species with pale conical caps that are a pale olive-cream colour with a darker olivaceous centre. It develops an iodoform smell as it dries out.

Mycena galericulata is known as the Common Bonnet and is arguably the most common, the most varied, and the largest of the genus. It can be a small and sturdy grey species with a cap up to 1.5 cms and growing directly on stumps or the bark of fallen wood but, in a woody litter habitat, it can grow much larger with a cap up to 4.5 cm diameter and having a stem up to 15 cm. The larger examples can remain grey but often they become creamy pink as they mature, looking entirely different from the typical. If the caps of larger specimens are held up to the light transverse markings or galleries can be seen in the cap tissue between the gills.

Mycena inclinata is a distinctive medium sized species that usually grows in tight clusters growing out of the side of oak stumps or on fallen oak wood. It has stems which at maturity are dark brown at the base grading into orange half-way and cream in the upper half. It has a rancid meally smell.

Mycena leptcephala is described in group 10 but the books say it can grow attached directly to fallen wood or even at the base of standing trunks. We usually find it on woody litter.

Mycena maculata is not common locally though it could be under-recorded. It looks rather like *M. galericulata* but develops reddish brown spots on the cap, stem and the gills. It grows directly on stumps and fallen wood.

Mycena olida is a white species with conical cap ranging from 5mm to 8mm diameter and a relatively short white stem giving it a slightly more sturdy appearance than other small white species. It grows directly on wood bark, including living mossy tree boles and roots, and on fallen wood. It is not common but we record it in several locations. It should be confirmed with a microscope.

Mycena polygramma is very similar to *M. galericulata* but with a more open conical pale grey cap and a long grey stem that frequently displays silvery longitudinal striations. It can grow singly but is usually in clusters of three or more and appears to be growing on soil or litter in broad-leaved woodlands but is almost always attached to buried twigs or other buried wood fragments.

Mycena stipata is an almost identical look-alike of *M. leptcephala* and it has a similar smell of bleach or chlorine, but it grows exclusively on conifer litter or attached to fallen conifer wood. It is not common with us but may have been recorded as *M. leptcephala* in the past.

Mycena vitilis is fully described in group 10 but is included here because it often appears to be on hardwood litter but can frequently be attached to buried twigs or other wood fragments.